

THE EARLY MODERN ENGLISH PERIOD (1500–1800)

CHAPTER

7



Society, Spellings, and Sounds

The early Modern period was transformative for both England and the language. The sixteenth to eighteenth centuries were a time of revolutionary development, opening the way for English to become a world language.

SOME KEY EVENTS IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

The following events during the early Modern English period significantly influenced the development of the English language.

- 1534 The Act of Supremacy established Henry VIII as “Supreme Head of the Church of England,” and thus officially put civil authority above Church authority in England.
- 1549 The *Book of Common Prayer* was adopted and became an influence on English literary style.
- 1558 At the age of 25, Elizabeth I became queen of England and, as a woman with a Renaissance education and a skill for leadership, began a forty-five-year reign that promoted statecraft, literature, science, exploration, and commerce.
- 1577–80 Sir Francis Drake circumnavigated the globe, the first Englishman to do so, and participated in the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, thus removing an obstacle to English expansion overseas.
- 1590–1611 William Shakespeare wrote the bulk of his plays, from *Henry VI* to *The Tempest*.
- 1600 The East India Company was chartered to promote trade with Asia, leading eventually to the establishment of the British Raj in India.
- 1604 Robert Cawdrey published the first English dictionary, *A Table Alphabeticall*.

- 1607 Jamestown, Virginia, was established as the first permanent English settlement in America.
- 1611 The Authorized or King James Version of the Bible was produced by a committee of scholars and became, with the Prayer Book and the works of Shakespeare, a major influence on English literary style.
- 1619 The first African slaves in North America arrived in Virginia.
- 1642–48 The Puritan Revolution overthrew the monarchy and established a military dictatorship, which lasted until the Restoration of King Charles II in 1660.
- 1660 The Royal Society was founded as the first English organization devoted to the promotion of scientific knowledge and research.
- 1670 Hudson's Bay Company was chartered for promoting trade and settlement in Canada.
- 1688 The Glorious Revolution was a bloodless coup in which Parliament invited William of Orange and his wife, Mary (daughter of the reigning English king), to assume the English throne, resulting in the establishment of Parliament's power over that of the monarchy.
- 1702 The first daily newspaper was published in London, resulting in the expanding power of the press to disseminate information and to form public opinion.
- 1719 Daniel Defoe published *Robinson Crusoe*, sometimes identified as the first modern novel in English.
- 1755 Samuel Johnson published his *Dictionary of the English Language*.
- 1775–83 The American Revolution resulted in the foundation of the first independent nation of English speakers outside the British Isles.
- 1788 The English first settled Australia near modern Sydney.

THE TRANSITION FROM MIDDLE TO MODERN ENGLISH

Despite vast changes in vocabulary and pronunciation, English speakers of the sixteenth century were unaware that they were leaving the Middle English period and entering the Modern. All such divisions between stages of the language's development are to some extent arbitrary, even though they are based on clear and significant internal changes in the language and also correlate with external events in the community of speakers.

EXPANSION OF THE ENGLISH VOCABULARY

The word stock of English was expanded greatly during the early Modern period in three ways. As literacy increased, a conscious need was felt to improve and amplify the vocabulary. As English speakers traveled abroad, they encountered new things that they needed new words to talk about. And as they traveled, they increasingly met speakers of other languages from whom they borrowed words.

During the Renaissance, an influx of Latin and Greek words (Chapter 12, 251–2) was associated with a vogue for **inkhorn terms**, so named from the fact that they were seldom spoken but mainly written (with a pen dipped into an ink container made of horn). The influence of the Classical languages has remained strong ever since. French

also continued to be a major source of loanwords into English (256–7), as it has been from the time of the Norman Conquest until today. In addition, Spanish and Portuguese (258–9) became significant sources for new words, especially as a result of colonial expansion in Latin America.

Many other languages contributed to the English vocabulary throughout the period. Celtic (252–3) and Scandinavian (253–4) continued their influence, but new impulses came from Italian (259) and German—both Low and High (260–2), including Yiddish (262). More far-flung influences were from the languages of Asia, Australasia, Africa, eastern Europe, Asia Minor, and the Americas (263–6).

Quite early in their history, the American colonies began to influence the general vocabulary with loanwords from the languages of both Amerindians and other European settlers in the New World. American colonists also changed the use of native English words and exported those changes, sometimes under protest, back to Britain. The first documented use of the word *lengthy* in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is by John Adams in his diary for January 3, 1759: “I grow too minute and lengthy.” Early British reactions to this perceived Americanism are typified by a 1793 censorious judgment in the *British Critic*: “We shall, at all times, with pleasure, receive from our transatlantic brethren real improvements of our common mother-tongue: but we shall hardly be induced to admit such phrases as ... ‘more lengthy’, for longer, or more diffuse.”

INNOVATION OF PRONUNCIATION AND CONSERVATION OF SPELLING

The fifteenth century, following the death of Chaucer, marked a turning point in the internal history of English, especially its pronunciation and spelling, for during this period the language underwent greater, more important phonological changes than in any other century before or since. Despite these radical changes in pronunciation, the old spelling was generally kept. William Caxton, who died in 1491, and the printers who followed him based their spellings, not on the pronunciation current in their day, but instead on late medieval manuscripts. Hence, although the quality of all the Middle English long vowels had changed, their spelling continued as it had been at earlier times. For instance, the Middle English [e:] of *feet*, *see*, *three*, etc. had been raised to [i:], but all such words went on being written as if no change had taken place. Consequently, the phonological value of many letters of the English alphabet changed drastically.

Printers and men of learning—misguided though they frequently were—greatly influenced English spelling. Learned men preferred archaic spellings, and they created some by respelling words etymologically. Printers also helped by normalizing older scribal practices. Although early printed works exhibit a good many inconsistencies, still they are quite orderly compared with the everyday manuscript writing of the time.

THE ORTHOGRAPHY OF EARLY MODERN ENGLISH

The spelling conventions of early Modern English were distinctive in a number of ways.

In a few words, notably *the* and *thee*, early printed books sometimes used *y* to represent the sounds usually spelled *th*. This substitution was made because the letter *þ* was still much used in English manuscripts, but the early printers got their type fonts from the Continent, where the letter *þ* was not normal. So they substituted for *þ* the closest thing they found in the foreign fonts, namely *y*. Thus *the* and *thee* were both sometimes printed as *y^e*. The plural pronoun meaning ‘you all,’ on the other hand, was written *ye*. When the *e* was above the line, the *y* was always a makeshift for *þ* and never represented [y].

Writing letters superscript, especially the final letter of a word, was a device to indicate abbreviation, much as we use a period. This convention lasted right through the nineteenth century, for example, in *M^r* for *Mr.* or *Gen^l* for *General*. The abbreviation *y^t* stands for *that*. The form *y^e* for *the* survives to our own day in such pseudo-antique absurdities as “Ye Olde Choppe Suey Shoppe,” in which it is usually pronounced as if it were the same word as the old pronoun *ye*. Needless to say, there is no justification whatever for such a pronunciation.

The present use of *i* for a vowel and *j* for a consonant was not established until the seventeenth century. In the King James Bible (1611) and the First Folio (1623) of Shakespeare, *i* is used for both values; see, for instance, the passage from the First Folio at the end of this chapter, in which Falstaff’s first name is spelled *lack*. Even after the distinction in writing was made, the feeling persisted for a long time that *i* and *j* were one and the same letter. Dr. Johnson’s *Dictionary* (1755) puts them together alphabetically, and this practice continued well into the nineteenth century.

It was similar with the curved and angular forms of *u*—that is, *u* and *v*—they too were originally used more or less indiscriminately for either vowel or consonant. For example, an older text will have *iaspre*, *liue*, and *vnder*, for which a present-day edition may substitute *jaspre* ‘jasper,’ *live*, and *under*, with *j* and *v* for *i* and *u* when they indicate consonants, and *u* for initial *v* when it indicates a vowel. By the middle of the seventeenth century, most English printers were making the same distinctions. The matter was purely graphic; no question of pronunciation was involved in the substitution. Yet as with *i* and *j*, catalogues and indexes put *u* and *v* together well into the nineteenth century. So in dictionaries *vizier* was followed by *ulcer*, *unzoned* by *vocable*, and *iambic* was set between *jamb* and *jangle*.

The sound indicated by *h* had been lost in late Latin, and hence the letter has no phonetic significance in those Latin-derived languages that retain it in their spelling. The influence of Classical Latin had caused French scribes to restore the *h* in the spelling of many words—for instance, *habit*, *herbage*, and *homme*—though it was never pronounced. It was also sometimes inserted in English words of French origin where it was not etymological—for instance, *habundance* (mistakenly regarded as coming from *habere* ‘to have’) and *abominable* (supposed to be from Latin *ab* plus *homine*, explained as ‘away from humanity, hence bestial’). When Shakespeare’s pedant Holofernes by implication recommended this latter misspelling and consequent mispronunciation with [h] in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (“This is abominable, which he would call abbominable”), he was in very good company, at least as far as the writing of the word is concerned, for the error had been current since Middle English times. Writers of Medieval Latin and Old French had been similarly misled by a false notion of the etymology of the word.

During the Renaissance, *h* was inserted after *t* in a number of foreign words—for instance, *throne*, from Old French *trone*, which came into English with an

initial [t] sound. The French word is from Latin *thronus*, borrowed from Greek, *th* being the normal Roman transliteration of Greek *θ*. The English respelling ultimately gave rise to a spelling pronunciation with [θ], as also in *theater* and *thesis*, which earlier had initial [t] as well. It was similar with the sound spelled *th* in *anthem*, *apothecary*, *Catherine* (the pet forms *Kate* and *Kit* preserve the older sound), and *Anthony* (compare *Tony*), which to a large extent has retained its historically expected pronunciation in British English. The only American pronunciation of *Anthony* is with [θ]. It is sometimes heard even in reference to Mark Antony, where the spelling does not encourage it. The *h* of *author*, from Old French *autor* (modern *auteur*), going back to Latin *auctor*, was first inserted by French scribes, to whom an *h* after *t* indicated no difference in pronunciation. When in the sixteenth century this fancy spelling began to be used in the English loanword, the way was paved for the modern pronunciation, historically a mispronunciation.

Other Renaissance respellings also effected changes in traditional pronunciations. An example is *schedule*, originally *cedule* from Old French. Its historically expected pronunciation would begin with [s], but the *sch*-spelling, a sixteenth-century innovation, changed that. Noah Webster recommended the American spelling pronunciation with initial [sk], as if the word were a Greek loan. The present-day British pronunciation of the first sound as [ʃ] is also historically an error.

Debt and *doubt* are fancy **etymological respellings** of *det* and *dout* (both Middle English from Old French), the *b* having been inserted because it was perceived that these words were ultimately derivatives of Latin *debitum* and *dubitare*, respectively. The *c* in *indict* and the *b* in *subtle* are similar. The learned men responsible for such respellings were followed by pedants like Shakespeare's Holofernes, who complains of those "rackers of ortagraphe [orthography]" who say *dout* and *det* when they should say *doubt* and *debt*. "*D, e, b, t*, not *d, e, t*," he says, unaware that the word was indeed written *d, e, t* before schoolmasters like himself began tinkering with spelling.

Rhyme and *rhythm* are twin etymological respellings. English had borrowed *rime* from Old French about the year 1200, but in the sixteenth century scholars began to spell the word also as *rythme* or *rhythm* and then a bit later as *rhyme*. These respellings reflected the origin of the French word in Latin *rithmus* or *rhythmus*, ultimately from Greek *rhythmos*. The *th* in the *rhythm* spelling came to be pronounced, and that form has survived as a separate word with the distinct meaning of 'cadence.' For the meaning 'repetition of sound,' the older *rime* spelling, which has continued alongside the fancy upstart *rhyme*, is better both historically and orthographically, and so is used in this book. Both are in standard use.

Comptroller is a pseudolearned respelling of *controller*, taken by English from Old French. The fancy spelling is doubtless due to an erroneous association with French *compte* 'count.' The word has fairly recently acquired a new pronunciation based on the misspelling. *Receipt* and *indict*, both taken from Anglo-French, and *victual*, from Old French, have been similarly remodeled to give them a Latin look; their traditional pronunciations have not as yet been affected, although a spelling pronunciation for the last is possible by those who do not realize that it is the same word as that spelled in the plural form *vittles*. *Parliament*, a respelling of the earlier *parlement* (a French loanword derived from the verb *parler* 'to speak'), has also fairly recently acquired a pronunciation such as the later spelling seems to indicate.

Another such change of long standing has resulted from the insertion of *l* in *fault* (ME *faute*, from Old French), a spelling suggested by Vulgar Latin *fallita* and strengthened by the analogy of *false*, which has come to us direct from Latin *falsus*.

For a while the word continued to be pronounced without the *l*, riming with *ought* and *thought* in seventeenth-century poetry. In Dr. Johnson’s day there was wavering between the older *l*-less and the newer pronunciation with *l*, as Johnson himself testifies in the *Dictionary*. The eighteenth-century **orthoepists** indicated the same wavering. They were men who conceived of themselves as exercising a directive function; they recommended and condemned, usually on quite irrelevant grounds. Seldom were they content merely to record variant pronunciations. Thomas Sheridan, the distinguished father of a more distinguished son named Richard Brinsley, in his *General Dictionary of the English Language* (1780) decides in favor of the *l*-less pronunciation of *fault*, as does James Elphinston in his *Propriety Ascertained* (1787). Robert Nares in his *Elements of Orthoëpy* (1784) records both pronunciations and makes no attempt to make a choice between them. John Walker in his *Critical Pronouncing Dictionary* (1791) declared that to omit the *l* made a “disgraceful exception,” for the word would thus “desert its relation to the Latin *falsitas*.” The history of the *l* of *vault* is quite similar.

Although such tinkering with the orthography is one cause of the discrepancy between spelling and pronunciation in Modern English, another and more important one is the change in the pronunciation of the tense vowels that helps to demark Middle from Modern English. This change, the most salient of all phonological developments in the history of English, is called the **Great Vowel Shift**.

THE GREAT VOWEL SHIFT

A comparison of the modern developments in parentheses in the chapter on Old English (87) shows clearly the modern representatives of the Old English long vowels. As has been pointed out, the latter changed only slightly in Middle English: [a:], in Old English written *a*, as in *stān*, was rounded except in the Northern dialect to [ɔ:], in Middle English written *o(o)*, as in *stoon*. But this was really the only noteworthy change in quality. By the early Modern English period, however, all the long vowels had shifted: Middle English *ē*, as in *sweete* ‘sweet,’ had already acquired the value [i] that it currently has, and the others were well on their way to acquiring the values that they have in current English. The changes in the long vowels are summarized in the following table:

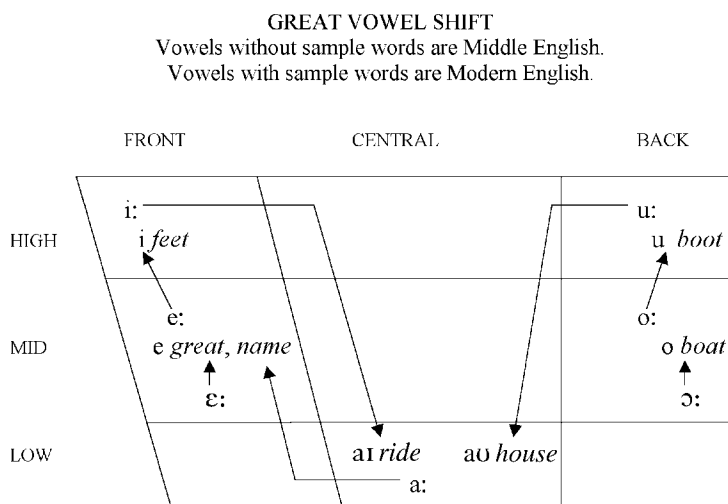
LONG VOWELS

Late Middle English		Early Modern English		Later English	
[a:] name	—————→	[æ:]	—————→	[ɛ:]	—————→ [e] name
[e:] feet	—————→	[i]	—————→		feet
[ɛ:] greet	—————→	[e]	—————→		great
[i:] ride	—————→	[əɪ]	—————→	[aɪ]	ride
[o:] boote	—————→	[u]	—————→		boot
[ɔ:] boot	—————→	[o]	—————→		boat
[u:] hous	—————→	[əʊ]	—————→	[aʊ]	house

In phonological terms:

1. The Middle English high vowels [i:] and [u:] were diphthongized, and then the vowels were centralized and lowered in two steps, first to [əi] and [əu], then to [aɪ] and [aʊ].
2. Each of the Middle English mid vowels was raised one step—higher mid [e:] and [o:] to [i] and [u], respectively, and then lower mid [ɛ:] and [ɔ:] to [e] and [o], respectively.
3. The low vowel [a:] was fronted to [æ:] and then raised in two steps through [ɛ:] to [e].

In early Modern English, vowel quality generally became more important than quantity, so length is shown with early Modern vowels only for [æ:] and [ɛ:], which alone were distinguished from short vowels primarily by length. The beginning and ending points of the shift can also be displayed diagrammatically as in the accompanying chart.



The stages by which the shift occurred and the cause of it are unknown. There are several theories, but as the evidence is ambiguous, they are best left to more specialized study. By some series of intermediate changes, long *i*, as in Middle English *rīden* ‘to ride,’ became a diphthong [əi]. This pronunciation survives in certain types of speech, particularly before voiceless consonants. It went on in most types of English to become in the course of the seventeenth century [aɪ], though there are variations in pronunciation.

It was similar with Middle English long *ū*, as in *hous* ‘house’: it became [əu]. This [əu], surviving in eastern Virginia and in some types of Canadian English, became [aʊ] at about the same time as [əi] became [aɪ].

Middle English [o:], as in *ro(o)te* ‘root,’ became [u]. Laxing of this [u] to [ʊ] has occurred in *book*, *foot*, *good*, *look*, *took*, and other words; in *blood* and *flood* there has also been unrounding, resulting in [ɔ] in these two words. The chronology of this subsequent laxing and unrounding is difficult to establish, as is the distribution of the

various developments. As Helge Kökeritz (*Shakespeare's Pronunciation* 236) points out, Shakespeare's riming of words that had Middle English long close *ō* gives no clue to his pronunciation, for he rimes *food* with *good* and *flood*, *mood* with *blood*, *reprove* with *love* and *dove*. If these are not merely traditional rimes, we must conclude that the distribution of [u], [ʊ], and [ə] was not in early Modern English the same as it is in current English, and there is indeed ample evidence that colloquial English did vacillate a good deal. This fact is not particularly surprising when we remember that there is at the present time a certain amount of wavering between [u] and [ʊ] in such words as *roof*, *broom*, *room*, *root*, and a few others.

The development of Middle English [ɔ:] is straightforwardly to [o] as in Modern English *home* and *stone*. However, in a few words this [ɔ:] was laxed perhaps before the Great Vowel Shift could affect it—for instance, in *hot*, from Middle English *hō(q)t*.

Middle English *ā* as in *name* and *ai* as in *nail* had by the early fifteenth century been leveled as [a:] and thus were affected alike by the Great Vowel Shift. The resultant homophony of *tale* and *tail* provided Shakespeare and his contemporaries with what seems to have been an almost irresistible temptation to make off-color puns (for instance, in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* 2.3.52ff and *Othello* 3.1.6ff). The current pronunciation of such words—that is, with [e]—became normal in standard English probably by the early years of the eighteenth century. All these pronunciations may have existed side by side, however, just as **retarded** and **advanced pronunciations** coexist in current English.

The development of Middle English [ɛ:] to Modern English [i] as in *three* and *kene* 'keen' is quite regular.

The development of Middle English [ɛ:], as in *heȝth* 'heath' and other such words, however, is complex. It has two results in early Modern English because of a change that seems to have occurred in late Middle English before the Great Vowel Shift operated. According to the Great Vowel Shift [ɛ:] becomes [e]; and that change is illustrated by Falstaff's *raisin-reason* pun of 1598, in the passage cited at the end of this chapter, and many other such puns—for example, *abased—a beast*, *grace-grease*. (The fullest treatment of Shakespeare's puns—sometimes childish, but frequently richly obscene—is in Part 2 of Kökeritz's *Shakespeare's Pronunciation*.)

But there is also convincing evidence that in late Middle English times, before the Great Vowel Shift occurred, the vowel [ɛ:] also came to exist as a dialect variant in words like *heath*, *beast*, and *grease*. Its precise history is unknown, but it may have developed as a pre-Great Vowel Shift raising in some variety of Middle English. So in late Middle English times, the *heath*, *beast*, and *grease* words could be pronounced in either of two ways—with [ɛ:] or with [e:]. Chaucer sometimes rimes historically close *e* words with words that ordinarily had open *e* in his type of English, indicating his familiarity with such a pre-1400 raising of [ɛ:] to [e:].

When the Great Vowel Shift occurred, it raised [ɛ:] to [e] and also [e:] to [i] in both ways of pronouncing the *heath*, *beast*, and *grease* words. So in early Modern English those words also had two pronunciations, with either [e] (mainly by fashionable people) or with [i] by the less fashionable. And that social difference lasted until the eighteenth century. But fashions change. And during the eighteenth century, the unfashionable pronunciation of the *heath*, *beast*, and *grease* words with [i] became fashionable, except in a few old-fashioned holdouts: *break*, *great*, *steak*, and *yea*. The present [i] vowel in such words as *heath*, *beast*, and *grease* is thus obviously, as H. C. Wyld (211) puts it, "merely the result of the abandonment of one type of pronunciation and the adoption of

another.” Other authorities agree with Wyld’s view—for instance, Kökeritz (*Shakespeare’s Pronunciation* 194–209) and E. J. Dobson (2:606–16).

Before that change in fashion, many rimes from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries testify to the [e] pronunciation in words that today have [i] instead—for instance, Jonathan Swift’s “You’d swear that so divine a creature / Felt no necessities of nature” (“Strephon and Chloe”), in which the riming words are to be pronounced [kretər] and [netər], and “You spoke a word began with H. / And I know whom you meant to teach” (“The Journal of a Modern Lady”), in which the riming words are [eč] and [teč].

The formerly standard and fashionable pronunciation with [e] survives today only in the handful of words mentioned above (*break*, *great*, *steak*, and *yea*) and in some dialects, such as Irish. A few surnames borne by families long associated with Ireland, like *Yeats* (compare *Keats*), *Re(a)gan*, and *Shea*, have also retained the pronunciation with [e], as does *Beatty* in American speech.

As Dobson (2:611) points out, “Throughout the [early] ModE period there was a struggle going on between two ways of pronouncing ‘ME ē words’”; ultimately the [i] pronunciation was to win out, so that only a few words remain as evidence of the [e] sound that prevailed in fashionable circles from about 1600 until the mid-eighteenth century. This process was gradual, as the fashion spread from one word to another.

OTHER VOWELS

STRESSED SHORT VOWELS

The stressed short vowels have remained relatively stable throughout the history of English. The most obvious changes affect Middle English short *a*, which shifted by way of [a] to [æ], and Middle English short *u*, which was unrounded and shifted to [ɔ], though its older value survives in a good many words in which the vowel was preceded by a labial consonant, especially if it was followed by *l*—for instance, *bull*, *full*, *pull*, *bush*, *push*, and *put* (but compare the variant *putt*).

It is evident that there was an unrounded variant of short *o*, reflected in spellings of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Wyld (240–1) cites a number of examples of *a* for *o* in spellings, including Queen Elizabeth I’s “I pray you stap the mouthes.” This unrounding did not affect the language as a whole, but such doublets as *strop*–*strap* and *god*–*gad* remain to testify to its having occurred. Today [ɑ] is the typical American vowel of most words that had short [ɔ] in Middle English (*god*, *stop*, *clock*, and so forth). Short *e* has not changed, except occasionally before [ŋ], as in *string* and *wing* from Middle English *streng* and *wenge*, and short *i* remains what it has been since Germanic times.

SHORT VOWELS

Late Middle English	Early Modern English	Later English
[a] that	→ [æ]	→
[ɛ] bed	→	→
[ɪ] in	→	→
[ɔ] on, odd	→	→ [ɔ] or [ɑ]
[u] but	→ [ɔ]	→

DIPHTHONGS

The Middle English diphthongs had a tendency to monophthongize. For example, [au] in *lawe* and [ɔu] in *snow* were monophthongized to [ɔ] and [o], respectively. The early fifteenth-century merger of [æɪ] in *nail* with [a:] as in *name* has already been mentioned; the subsequent history of that diphthong was the same as that of the long vowel with which it merged.

The Middle English diphthongs [ɛu] and [ɪu], written *eu*, *ew*, *iu*, *iw*, and *u* (depending to some extent on when they were written), merged into [yu]. As we saw in Chapter 2, this [yu] has tended to be reduced to [u] in such words as *duty*, *Tuesday*, *lute*, and *stews*, in which it follows an alveolar sound. The [y] has been retained at the beginning of a word (*use* as distinct from *ooze*) and after labials and velars: *b* (*beauty* as distinct from *booty*), *p* (*pew* as distinct from *pooh*), *m* (*mute* as distinct from *moot*), *v* (*view* as distinct from the first syllable of *voodoo*), *f* (*feud* as distinct from *food*), *g* (the second syllable of *argue* as distinct from *goo*), *k* (often spelled *c* as in *cute* as distinct from *coot*), and *h* (*hew* as distinct from *who*). After [z], this [y] ultimately gave rise by mutual assimilation to a new single sound [ʒ] in *azure*, *pleasure*, and the like. Similarly, the earlier medial or initial [sy] in *pressure*, *nation*, *sure*, and the like has become [ʃ], though this was not a new sound, having occurred under other circumstances in Old English.

The Middle English diphthong [ɔɪ], occurring almost exclusively in words of French origin, such as *poison*, *join*, and *boil*, was written *oi* rather than *ui* because of the substitution of *o* for *u* next to stroke letters, in this case *i* (Chapter 6, 118). The first element of this diphthong shifted to [ə] along with other short *u*'s. The diphthong thus fell together with the development of Middle English *ī* as [əɪ], both subsequently becoming [aɪ]. So the verb *boil*, from Old French *boillir* (ultimately Lat. *bullire*) became current nonstandard [baɪl]. Many rimes in our older poetry testify to this identity in pronunciation of the reflexes of Middle English *ī* and *ui*—for instance, Alexander Pope's couplet "While expletives their feeble aid do join; / And ten low words oft creep in one dull line." The current standard pronunciation of words spelled with *oi* for etymological *ui* is based on the spelling. Some dialects, however, preserve the pronunciation with [aɪ] (Kurath and McDavid 167–8, maps 143–6).

The quite different Middle English diphthong spelled *oi* and pronounced [ɔɪ] is also of French origin, going back to Latin *au*, as in *joie* (ultimately Lat. *gaudia*) and *cloistre* (Lat. *claustrum*). It has not changed significantly since its introduction.

DIPHTHONGS

Late Middle English	Early Modern English	Later English
[au] lawe	→ [ɔ]	→
[ɔu] snow	→ [o]	→
[æɪ] nail	→ [a:] → [æ:]	→ [ɛ:] → [e]
[ɛu], [ɪu] fewe, knew	→ [yu]	→
[ɔɪ] join	→ [əɪ] → [aɪ]	→ [ɔɪ]
[ɔɪ] joy	→	→

QUANTITATIVE VOWEL CHANGES

Quantitative changes in the Modern English period include the lengthening of an originally short vowel before voiceless fricatives—of [æ] as in *staff*, *glass*, and *path* to [æ:], which in the late eighteenth century was replaced by [ɑ] in standard British English; most forms of American English, however, keep the unlengthened [æ]. Similarly, short *o* was lengthened in *soft*, *lost*, and *cloth*; that lengthened vowel survives in American English as [ɔ], compared with the [ɑ] of *sot*, *lot*, and *clot*, which comes directly from an earlier short *o* without lengthening. Short [ɔ] also lengthened before [g], as in *dog*, compared with *dock*. In *dog* versus *dock* the lengthening has resulted in a qualitatively distinct vowel in most varieties of American English, [ɔ] versus [ɑ]. The earlier laxing of [u] to [ʊ] in words such as *hood* and *good* has already been referred to in connection with the development of Middle English [o:] in the Great Vowel Shift. In *mother*, *brother*, *other*, and *smother*, originally long vowels were shortened (with eventual modification to [ɔ]). *Father* and (in some types of speech) *rather*, with originally short vowels, have undergone lengthening, for what reason we cannot be sure—quite contrary to the shortening that occurred in *lather* and *gather*.

EARLY MODERN ENGLISH CONSONANTS

The consonants of English, like the short vowels, have been rather stable, though certain losses have occurred within the Modern English period.

The Old English and Middle English voiceless palatal fricative [ç], occurring next to front vowels and still represented in our spelling by *gh*, disappeared entirely, as in *bright*, *sigh*, and *weigh*. The identically written voiceless velar fricative [x], occurring next to back vowels, either disappeared, as in *taught*, *bought*, and *bough*, or became [f], as in *cough*, *laugh*, and *enough*. These changes occurred as early as the fifteenth century in England south of the Humber, though there is evidence that still in the later part of the sixteenth century old-fashioned speakers and a few pedants retained the sounds or at least thought that they ought to be retained (Kökeritz, *Shakespeare's Pronunciation* 306).

In the final sequence *-mb*, the *b* had disappeared in pronunciation before the beginning of the Modern English period, so the letter *b* could be added after final *m* where it did not etymologically belong, in *limb*. There was a similar tendency to reduce final *-nd*, as in *lawn*, from Middle English *laund*; confusion seems to have arisen, however, because a nonetymological *-d* has been added in *sound* and *lend* (ME *soun* and *lene*), though in the latter word the excrescent *d* occurred long before the Modern English period.

The *l* of the Middle English preconsonantal *al* was lost after first becoming a vowel: thus Middle English *al* and *au* fell together as *au*, ultimately becoming [ɔ] (as in *talk*, *walk*) or [æ] before *f* and *v* (as in *half*, *salve*) or [ɑ] before *m* (as in *calm*, *palm*). The *l* retained in the spelling of these words has led to spelling pronunciations, particularly when it occurs before *m*; many speakers now pronounce the *l* in words like *calm* and *palm*. The *l* of *ol* was similarly lost before certain consonants by vocalization, as in *folk*, *yolk*, *Holmes*, and the like.

A number of postvocalic *l*'s in English spelling were added because the ultimate Latin sources of their words had an *l*, although it had disappeared in French, from

which the words were borrowed; ultimately those added *l*'s came to be pronounced from the new spellings. The *l* in the spelling of *falcon* was thus restored from the Latin etymon (ME *faucion*, from Old French, in which the vocalization to [u] also occurred). A football team known as the *Falcons* is everywhere called [fælkənz], a pronunciation widely current for the bird long before the appearance of the team. The spelling has as yet had little if any effect on the pronunciation of the name of the writer William Faulkner. Perhaps if the name had been written *Falconer*, which amounts to the same thing, the spelling pronunciation might in time have come to prevail. As noted above, the *l* in *fault* and *vault* was also inserted. The older pronunciation of the first of these words is indicated by Swift's "O, let him not debase your thoughts, / Or name him but to tell his faults" ("Directions for Making a Birth-Day Song").

In French loanwords like *host* and *humble* the *h*, because it is in the spelling, has gradually come to be pronounced in all but a few words; it was generally lacking in such words in early Modern English. In *herb*, the *h* remains silent for many American speakers, but is pronounced by others, and by British speakers generally. In other words, such as *hour*, the *h* is silent in all varieties of English.

There was an early loss of [r] before sibilants, not to be confused with the much later loss (not really normal before the nineteenth century) before any consonant or before a pause: older *barse* 'a type of fish' by such loss became *bass*, as *arse* became *ass*, and *bust*, *nuss*, *fust* developed from *burst*, *nurse*, *first*; this was not, however, a widespread change. An early loss of [r] before *l* is indicated by *palsy* (ME *parlesie*, a variant of *paralisie* 'paralysis').

The final unstressed syllable *-ure* was pronounced [ər], with preceding *t*, *d*, and *s* having the values [t], [d], and [s] or intervocally [z], as in *nature* [-tər], *verdure* [-dər], *censure* [-sər], and *leisure* [-zər], until the nineteenth century. Though Noah Webster's use of such pronunciations was considered rustic and old-fashioned by his more elegant contemporaries, in his *Elementary Spelling Book* of 1843 he gave *gesture* and *jester* as homophones. The older pronunciation is indicated by many rimes: to cite Dean Swift once more, "If this to clouds and stars will venture, / That creeps as far to reach the centre" ("Verses on Two Celebrated Modern Poets"). Webster was also opposed to [-č-] in *fortune*, *virtue*, and the like, which he seems to have associated with fast living. He preferred [-t-] in such words. But many of the pronunciations that he prescribed were scorned by all of the proper Bostonians of his day.

The initial consonant sequences *gn* and *kn*, still represented in our spelling of *gnarl*, *gnat*, *gnaw*, *knave*, *knead*, *knee*, and a few other words, had lost their first elements by the early seventeenth century. Loss of [k] is evidenced by the Shakespearean puns *knack-neck*, *knight-night*, and others cited by Kökeritz (*Shakespeare's Pronunciation* 305).

Final *-ing* when unstressed, as in verb forms like *walking* or *coming* and in pronouns like *nothing* and *something*, had long been practically universally pronounced [-ɪn]. According to Wyld (289), "This habit obtains in practically all Regional dialects of the South and South Midlands, and among large sections of speakers of Received Standard English." The velarization of the *n* to [ŋ] began as a **hypercorrect pronunciation** in the first quarter of the nineteenth century and, still according to Wyld, "has now a vogue among the educated at least as wide as the

more conservative one with *-n*.” Long before Wyld wrote these words, which would need some revision for British English today, the [-in] pronunciation had come to be considered substandard in many parts of the United States, largely because of the crusade that teachers had conducted against it, though it continues to occur rather widely in unselfconscious speech on all social levels. Many spellings and rimes in our older literature testify to the orthodoxy of what is popularly called “dropping the *g*”—in phonological terms, using dental [n] instead of velar [ŋ], for there is of course no [g] to be dropped. For instance, Swift wrote the couplets “See then what mortals place their bliss in! / Next morn betimes the bride was missing” (“Phyllis”) and the delicate “His jordan [chamber pot] stood in manner fitting / Between his legs, to spew or spit in” (“Cassinus and Peter”). **Inverse spellings** such as Shakespeare’s *cushings* (*cushions*), *javelings* (*javelins*), and *napking* (*napkin*) tell the same story (cited by Kökeritz, *Shakespeare’s Pronunciation* 314).

EVIDENCE FOR EARLY MODERN PRONUNCIATION

Our knowledge of early Modern English pronunciation comes from many sources. Fortunately not all gentlefolk knew how to spell in earlier days, which is to say that they did not know conventional spellings. So they spelled phonetically, according to their lights. What is by modern standards a “misspelling,” like *coat* for *court* or *crick* for *creek*, may tell us a good deal about the writer’s pronunciation. A good many such writings have come down to us.

STRESS

Many words in early Modern English were stressed otherwise than they are in current speech, as we can tell especially from poetry. *Character*, *illustrate*, *concentrate*, and *contemplate* were all stressed on their second syllables, and most polysyllabic words in *-able* and *-ible* had initial stress, frequently with secondary stress on their penultimate syllables, as in Shakespeare’s “’Tis sweet and commendable in your Nature Hamlet.” *Antique*, like *complete* and other words that now have final stress, had initial stress; *antique* is a doublet of *antic*, with which it was identical in pronunciation. But it is not always possible to come to a firm conclusion on the basis of verse, as the many instances of variant stress in Shakespeare’s lines indicate (Kökeritz, *Shakespeare’s Pronunciation* 392–8). It is likely that most of these variant stress placements occurred in actual speech; it would be surprising if they had not, considering the variations that occur in current English.

SCHOLARLY STUDIES

Henry Wyld in his *History of Modern Colloquial English* has used many memoirs, letters, diaries, and documents from this period as the basis for his conclusions concerning the pronunciation of early Modern English. Kökeritz relies somewhat more than Wyld on the grammars and spelling books that began to appear around the middle of the sixteenth century, which he considers “our most important sources of information” (17) for the pronunciation of English in Shakespeare’s day—works

such as John Hart's *An Orthographic* (1569) and *A Methode or Comfortable Beginning for All Unlearned* (1570), William Bullokar's *Booke at Large* (1580) and *Bref Grammar for English* (1586), Richard Mulcaster's *The First Part of the Elementarie* (1582), and, in the following century, Alexander Gill's *Logonomia Anglica* (1619; 2nd ed., 1621) and Charles Butler's *English Grammar* (1633; 2nd ed., 1634), which has a list of homophones in its "Index of Words Like and Unlike." These same works, with others, provide the basis for Dobson's two-volume *English Pronunciation 1500–1700*.

There are special studies of these early Modern writers on language by Otto Jespersen (on Hart), Bror Danielsson (Hart and Gill), and R. E. Zachrisson (Bullokar), along with general studies of early Modern English by Wilhelm Horn and Martin Lehnert, Eilert Ekwall (*A History of Modern English Sounds and Morphology*), and Karl Luick. The first volume of Jespersen's *Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles* deals with early Modern English phonology and orthography.

The use of wordplay and rime has already been alluded to a number of times. Kökeritz makes extensive and most effective use of these in *Shakespeare's Pronunciation*, a work that has been cited a number of times heretofore. There is no dearth of evidence, though what we have is often difficult to interpret.

EARLY MODERN ENGLISH ILLUSTRATED

SPELLING

The following paragraph is the chapter "Rosemary" from Banckes's *Herball* (1525), a hodgepodge of botanical and medical lore and a good deal of sheer superstition thrown together and "impyrnted by me Richard Banckes, dwellynge in London, a lytel fro y^e Stockes in y^e Pultry, y^e .xxv. day of Marche. The yere of our lorde .M.CCCCC. & xxv." The only known original copies of this old black-letter "doctor book" are one in the British Museum and one in the Huntington Library in California. What became of the many other copies of the work, which went through at least fifteen editions, no one can say.

Noteworthy orthographic features of the book include the spelling y^e for *the* or *thee*, explained earlier in this chapter. Also, a line or tilde-like diacritic over a vowel indicates omission of a following *n* or *m*, as in *thē* for *them* and *thā* for *than*. This device is very ancient. The virgules, or slanting lines, are the equivalents of our commas, used to indicate brief pauses in reading. As was the custom, *v* is used initially (*venymous*, *vnder*) and *u* elsewhere (*hurte*, *euyll*), regardless of whether consonant or vowel was represented. Some of the final *e*'s are used for justifying lines of type—that is, making even right-hand margins—a most useful expedient when type had to be set by hand. Long *s* (ſ), which must be carefully distinguished from the similar "f," is used initially and medially.

The statement in the first line about the herb's being "hote and dry" is an allusion to an ancient theory of matter that classified the nature of everything as a combination of hot or cold and moist or dry qualities.

Rosemary.

This herbe is hote and dry/ take the flowres and put them in a linnen clothe/ & fo boyle them in fayre clene water to y^e halfe & coole it & drynke it/ for it is moche worth agaynft all euylles in the body. Also take the flowres & make powder therof and bynde it to the ryght arme in a linnen clothe/ and it shall make the lyght and mery. Also ete the flowres with hony fastynge with fowre breed and there shall ryfe in the none euyl swellynges. Also take the flowres and put them in a cheft amonge youre clothes or amonge bokes and moughtes [moths] shall not hurte them. Also boyle the flowres in gotes mylke & than let them stande all a nyght vnder the ayer fayre couered/ after that gyue hym to drynke thereof that hath the tyfye [phthisic] and it shall delyuer hym. Also boyle the leues in whyte wyne & waffe thy face therewith/ thy berde & thy browes and there shall no cornes growe out/ but thou shall haue a fayre face. Also put the leues vnder thy beddes heed/ & thou shall be delyuered of all euyl dremes. Also breke y^e leues small to powder & laye them on a Canker & it shall flee it. Also take the leues & put the into a vessel of wyne and it shall preferue y^e wyne fro tartnesse & euyl sauour/ and yf thou sell that wyne, thou shall haue good lucke & spede [success] in the sale. Also yf thou be feble with vnkyndly [unnatural] swette/ take and boyle the leues in clene water, & whan y^e water is colde do [put] therto as moche of whyte wyne/ & than make therin foppes & ete thou well therof/ & thou shall recouer appetyte. Also yf thou haue the flux boyle y^e leues in stronge Ayfell [vinegar] & than bynde them in a lynnē [c]lothe and bynde it to thy wombe [belly] & anone the flux shall withdrawe. Also yf thy legges be blowen with the gout/ boyle the leues in water/ & than take the leues & bynde them in a linnen clothe aboute thy legges/ & it shall do y^e moche good. Also take the leues and boyle them in stronge Ayfell & bynde them in a clothe to thy stomake/ & it shall delyuer y^e of all euylles. Also yf thou haue the coughe/ drynke the water of the leues boyled in whyte wyne/ & thou shall be hole. Also take the rynde of Rosemary & make powder therof and drynke it for the poxe [head cold]/ & thou shall be delyuered therof. Also take the tymbre therof & brūne [burn] it to coles & make powder therof & thā put it into a linnen cloth and rubbe thy tethe therewith/ & yf there be ony wormes therin it shall flee them & kepe thy tethe from all euyls. Also make the a box of the wood and smell to it and it shall preferne¹ thy youthe. Also put therof in thy doores or in thy howse & thou shall be without daunger of Adders and other ven-ymous serpentes. Also make the a barell therof & drynke thou of the drynke that standeth therin & thou nedes to fere no poyson that shall hurte y^e/ and yf thou set it in thy garden kepe it honestly [decently] for it is moche profytable. Also yf a mā haue lost his smellynge of the ayre orelles he maye not drawe his brethe/ make a fyre of the wood & bake his breed therewith & gyue it hym to ete & he shall be hole.

PRONUNCIATION

All quotations from Shakespeare's plays in this chapter are from the First Folio (facsimile ed., London, 1910) with the line numbering of the *Globe* edition (1891) as given in Bartlett's *Concordance*. Roman type has been substituted for the italic used for proper names occurring in speeches in the First Folio, except for one instance in the passage cited below.

¹ The printer has inadvertently turned the *u* that was in his copy, to make an *n*.

In the passage from Shakespeare's *1 Henry IV* (2.4.255–66) that follows, the phonetic transcription indicates a somewhat conservative pronunciation that was probably current in the south of England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Vowel length is indicated only in the single word *reason(s)*, in which it was distinctive. Stress is indicated, but no attempt has been made to show fine gradations. Prince Hal, Poins, and Falstaff, who has just told a whopping lie, are speaking:

- Prin.* Why, how could'st thou know these men in Kendall Greene, when it
[wəɪ 'həʊ 'kʊdst ðəʊ 'no ðɪz 'mɛn ɪn 'kɛndəl 'grɪn 'hwɛn ɪt
was fə darke, thou could'st not see thy Hand? Come, tell vs your reason:
wəz 'so 'dærk ðəʊ 'kʊdst nɒt 'si ðəɪ 'hænd 'kʊm 'tɛl əs jər 'rɛːzən
what say'st thou to this?
hwæt 'sɛst ðəʊ tə 'ðɪs
- Poin.* Come, your reason *Iack*, your reason.
'kʊm jər 'rɛːzən 'jæk jər 'rɛːzən
- Falst.* What, vpon compulsion? No: were I at the Strappado, or all the
'hwæt ə'pɒn kəm'pʊlsjən 'no 'wɛr əɪ æt ðə stræ'pædɔ ər 'ɔl ðə
Racks in the World, I would not tell you on compulsion. Giue you a
'ræks ɪn ðə 'wɜːld əɪ 'wʊld nɒt 'tɛl ju ɒn kəm'pʊlsjən 'gɪv ju ə
reason on compulsion? If Reasons were as plentie as Black-berries,
'rɛːzən ɒn kəm'pʊlsjən ɪf 'rɛːzənz wɛr əz 'plɛnti əz 'blæk'berɪz
I would giue no man a Reason vpon compulsion, I.
əɪ wəd 'gɪv 'no 'mæn ə 'rɛːzən ə'pɒn kəm'pʊlsjən 'əɪ]

In this transcription it is assumed that Falstaff, a gentleman (even if a somewhat decayed one) and an officer as well, would have been highly conservative in pronunciation, thus preferring slightly old-fashioned [sy] in *compulsion* to the newer [ʃ] to be heard in the informal speech of his time (Kökeritz, *Shakespeare's Pronunciation* 317). It is also assumed that Falstaff used an unstressed form of *would* [wəd] in his last sentence, in contrast to the strongly stressed form [wʊld] of his second sentence, and that, even though the Prince may have had the sequence [hw] in his speech, he would not have pronounced the [h] in his opening interjectional *Why*, thus following the usual practice of those American speakers of the last century who had [hw] when the word is interrogative, but [w] when it is an interjection or an expletive (Kenyon 159).

It is a great pity that there was no tape recorder at the Globe playhouse.

FOR FURTHER READING

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- Black. *A History of the British Isles*.
 ———. *A New History of England*.
 Morgan. *The Oxford History of Britain*.

OVERVIEWS

- Barber. *Early Modern English*.
 Görlach. *Eighteenth-Century English*.
 ———. *Introduction to Early Modern English*.
 Lass. *The Cambridge History of the English Language*. Vol. 3: 1476–1776.
 Wright. *The Development of Standard English 1300–1800*.
 Wyld. *A History of Modern Colloquial English*.

THE GREAT VOWEL SHIFT

- Wolfe. *Linguistic Change and the Great Vowel Shift in English*.
 Zachrisson. *Pronunciation of English Vowels, 1400–1700*.

SHAKESPEAREAN ENGLISH

- Kökeritz. *Shakespeare's Pronunciation*.
 Onions. *A Shakespeare Glossary*.
 Partridge. *Shakespeare's Bawdy*.
 Zachrisson. *English Pronunciation at Shakespeare's Time*.

DICTIONARIES, USAGE, AND STANDARD ENGLISH

- Fisher. *The Emergence of Standard English*.
 Lancashire. *Early Modern English Dictionaries Database*.
 Leonard. *Doctrine of Correctness in English Usage, 1700–1800*.
 Reddick. *The Making of Johnson's Dictionary, 1746–1773*.
 Sledd and Kolb. *Dr. Johnson's Dictionary*.
 Starnes and Noyes. *The English Dictionary from Cawdrey to Johnson, 1604–1755*.



CHAPTER

8

THE EARLY MODERN
ENGLISH PERIOD
(1500–1800)

Forms, Syntax, and Usage

The early part of the Modern English period saw the establishment of the standard written language we know today. Its standardization was due first to the need of the central government for regular procedures by which to conduct its business, to keep its records, and to communicate with the citizens of the land. Standard languages are often the by-products of bureaucracy, developed to meet a specific administrative need, as prosaic as such a source is, rather than spontaneous developments of the populace or the artifice of writers and scholars. John H. Fisher has argued that standard English was first the language of the Court of Chancery, founded in the fifteenth century to give prompt justice to English citizens and to consolidate the king's influence in the nation. It was then taken up by the early printers, who adapted it for other purposes and spread it wherever their books were read, until finally it fell into the hands of schoolteachers, dictionary makers, and grammarians.

The impulse to study language did not, in the first instance, arise out of a disinterested passion for knowledge, just as the development of a standard language did not spring from artistic motives. Both were highly practical matters, and they were interrelated. A standard language is spread widely over a large region, is respected because people recognize its usefulness, and is codified in the sense of having been described so that people know what it is. A standard language has to be studied and described before it is fully standard, and the detailed study of a language has to have an object that is worth the intense effort such study requires. So the existence of a standard language and the study of that language go together.

Two principal genres of language description are the dictionary and the grammar book. Dictionaries focus on the words of a language; grammar books, on how words relate to one another in a sentence. The writing of dictionaries and of grammar books for English began and achieved a high level of competence during the early Modern English period. Several motives prompted their development.

English had replaced French as the language of government in the late Middle English period. It replaced Latin as the language of religion after the Reformation, and particularly with the 1549 adoption of the Book of Common Prayer, which presented church services in a language “understood of the people,” as the Articles of Religion put it. English was being used again for secular purposes after nearly three hundred years of not having been so used, and it was being used for sacred purposes that were new to it. These revived and new uses provided a strong motive for “getting it right.” In addition, English people were discovering their place on the international scene, both political and cultural, and that discovery also prompted a desire to make the language “copious,” that is, having a large enough vocabulary to deal with all the new subjects English people needed to talk about.

In addition, social mobility was becoming easier and more widespread than ever before. Social classes were never impermeable in England. Geoffrey Chaucer’s ancestors must have been shoemakers, judging from his surname, which is from an Old French word *chausse*, meaning ‘footwear, leggings,’ and his father was a wine merchant, yet he became an intimate of royals and a diplomat on the Continent for the English king—talent will out. However, the later part of the early Modern period, particularly the eighteenth century, saw a significant shift of power and importance from king to Parliament and from the landed gentry to the mercantile middle class. The newly empowered middle class did not share the old gentry’s confidence of manners and language. Instead, they wanted to know what was “right.” They looked for guidance in language and in other matters. Lexicographers and grammarians were only too happy to oblige them.

THE STUDY OF LANGUAGE

EARLY DICTIONARIES

The first English dictionaries appeared in the early Modern English period. If one had to set up a line of development for them, one would start with the Old and Middle English interlinear glosses in Latin and French texts, then proceed through the bilingual vocabularies produced by schoolmasters and designed for those studying foreign languages, specifically Latin, French, Italian, and Spanish. But the first work designed expressly for listing and defining English words for English-speaking people was the schoolmaster Robert Cawdrey’s *Table Alphabeticall* (1604) (“conteyning and teaching the true writing, and understanding of hard usuall English wordes, borrowed from the Hebrew, Greeke, Latine, or French. &c.”).

Other dictionaries followed in the same tradition of explaining “hard words” but gradually moved toward a full list of the English vocabulary, among them, that of John Bullokar, Doctor of Physick, *An English Expositour* (1616); Henry Cockeram’s *English Dictionarie* (1623); Thomas Blount’s *Glossographia* (1656); Edward Phillips’s *New World of English Words* (1658); Edward Cocker’s *English Dictionary* (1704); and Nathan Bailey’s *Universal Etymological English Dictionary* (1721), with a second volume that was really a supplement appearing in 1727. In 1730, Bailey (and others) produced the *Dictionarium Britannicum*, with about 48,000 entries. In 1755 Samuel Johnson published his great two-volume *Dictionary*

of the *English Language*, which was based on the *Dictionarium Britannicum*, though containing fewer entries than it.

The publication of Johnson's *Dictionary* was certainly the most important linguistic event of the eighteenth century, not to say the entire period under discussion, for to a large extent it "fixed" English spelling and established a standard for the use of words. Johnson did indeed attempt to exercise a directive function. It would have been strange had he not done so at that time. For most people it is apparently not sufficient, even today, for the lexicographer simply to record and define the words of the language and to indicate how they are pronounced by those who use them; he is also supposed to have some God-given power of determining which words are "good" words and which are "bad" ones and to know how they "ought" to be pronounced. But Johnson had the good sense usually to recognize the prior claims of usage over the arbitrary appeals to logic, analogy, Latin grammar, and sheer prejudice so often made by his contemporaries, even if he did at times settle matters by appeals to his own taste—which was fortunately good taste.

The son of a bookseller in Lichfield, Johnson was a Tory in both name and conviction. Hence, along with his typical eighteenth-century desire to "fix" the language went a great deal of respect for upper-class usage. He can thus be said truly to have consolidated a standard of usage that was not altogether of his own making. His use of illustrative quotations, literally by the thousands, was an innovation; but his own definitions show the most discriminating judgment. The quirky definitions, like that for *oats*—"a grain which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people"—are well-known, so well-known that some people must have the false impression that there are very many others not so well-known. It is in a way unfortunate that these dictionary jokes have been played up for their amusement value, for they are actually few in number.

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ATTITUDES TOWARD GRAMMAR AND USAGE

The purist attitude predominant in eighteenth-century England was the manifestation of an attitude toward language that has been current in all times and in all places, as it is in our own day. Doubtless there are and have been purists—persons who believe in an absolute and unwavering standard of "correctness"—in even the most undeveloped societies, for **purism** is a matter of temperament rather than of culture.

Although very dear to American purists, the "rules" supposed to govern English usage originated not in America, but in the mother country. The Englishmen who formulated them were as ill-informed and as inconsistent as their slightly later American counterparts. Present-day notions of "correctness" are to a large extent based on the notion, prominent in the eighteenth century, that language is of divine origin and hence was perfect in its beginnings but is constantly in danger of corruption and decay unless it is diligently kept in line by wise people who are able to get themselves accepted as authorities, such as those who write dictionaries and grammars.

Latin was regarded as having retained much of its original "perfection." No one seems to have been very much aware that the language of Rome was the culmination

of a long development with many changes of the sort deplored in English. When English grammars came to be written, they were based on Latin grammar, even down to the terminology. The most influential of the eighteenth-century advocates of **prescriptive grammar**, who aimed at bringing English into a Latin-like state of perfection, was Robert Lowth (1710–87). He was a theologian, Hebraist, professor of poetry at Oxford from 1741 to 1753, later bishop of Oxford, then of London, and dean of the Chapel Royal, who four years before his death was offered the archbishopric of Canterbury, but refused it.

In the preface to his *Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762), Lowth agreed with Dean Swift's charge, made in 1712 in his *Proposal for Correcting, Improving, and Ascertaining* [that is, fixing or making certain] *the English Tongue*, that "our language is extremely imperfect," "that it offends against every part of grammar," and that most of the "best authors of our age" commit "many gross improprieties, which . . . ought to be discarded." Lowth was able to find many egregious blunders in the works of our most eminent writers; his footnotes are filled with them. It apparently never occurred to any of his contemporaries to doubt that so famous and successful a man had inside information about an ideal state of the English language. Perhaps they thought he got it straight from a linguistic Yahweh.

In any case, Lowth set out in all earnestness in the midst of a busy life to do something constructive about the deplorable English written by the masters of English literature. Like most men of his time, he believed in universal grammar. Consequently he believed that English was "easily reducible to a System of rules." Among many other achievements, he promulgated the rules for *shall* and *will* that had been formulated by John Wallis in his *Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae*. Those rules, which continue to be cited by prescriptivists, were never accurate and are irrelevant for most speakers today.

One of the most influential of the late eighteenth-century grammarians was Lindley Murray, a Philadelphia-born Quaker who returned to England after the American Revolution and wrote an *English Grammar* for use in Quaker girls' schools. He was motivated by a wish to foster the study of the native language, as opposed to Latin, and by his religious piety, which "predisposed him to regard linguistic matters in terms of right and wrong. His highly moralistic outlook perforce carried over into his attitude toward usage" (Read, "Motivation of Lindley Murray's Grammatical Work" 531).

Although the grammarians who proclaimed rules for language were children of their age, influenced in linguistic matters by their attitudes toward other aspects of life, they must not therefore be thought contemptible. Bishop Lowth was not—and, heaven knows, Dean Swift, one of the glories of English literature, was certainly not. Nor was Joseph Priestley, who, in addition to writing the original and in many respects forward-looking *Rudiments of English Grammar* (1761), was the discoverer of oxygen, a prominent nonconformist preacher, and a voluminous writer on theological, scientific, political, and philosophical subjects. Like George Campbell, who in his *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776) went so far as to call language "purely a species of fashion," Priestley recognized the superior force of usage. He also shared Campbell's belief that there was need to control language in some way other than by custom. Being children of the Age of Reason, both had recourse to the principle

of analogy to settle questions of divided usage, though admitting that it was not always possible to do so.

All these men were indeed typical of their time, in most respects a good time; and they were honest men according to their lights, which in other respects were quite bright indeed. We cannot blame them for not having information that was unavailable in their day or for holding attitudes that were universal in their time. Present-day purists cannot claim such justification. Despite the tremendous advances of linguistics since the eighteenth century, popular attitudes toward language have changed very little since Bishop Lowth and Lindley Murray were laying down the law. Their precepts were largely based on what they supposed to be logic and reason, for they believed that the laws of language were rooted in the natural order, and this was of course “reasonable.”

To cite an example, eighteenth-century grammarians outlawed the emphatic double negative construction for the reason stated by Lowth, that “two Negatives in English destroy one another, or are equivalent to an Affirmative,” just as they do in mathematics, though the analogy is quite false. Many very reasonable people of earlier times produced sentences with two or even more negatives, as many today still do. Chaucer has four in “Forwhy to tellen nas [ne was] nat his entente / To nevere no man” (*Troilus and Criseyde*) and four in his description of the Knight in the General Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*: “He nevere yet no vileynye ne sayde / In al his lyf unto no maner wight.” It certainly never occurred to him that these would cancel out and thus *reverse* his meaning. The double negative is not part of formal standard English today because people who use formal standard English don’t use it—not because it is unreasonable.

Modern linguistics has made very little headway in convincing those who have not studied the subject that language is a living, hence changing, thing, rather than an ideal toward which we should all hopelessly aspire. Some schoolroom grammars and handbooks of English usage continue to perpetuate the tradition of Bishop Lowth’s *Short Introduction to English Grammar*. Indeed, the very word *grammar* means to many highly literate people not the study of language, but merely so simple a thing as making the “proper” choice between *shall* and *will*, *between* and *among*, *different from* and *different than*, and *who* and *whom*, as well as the avoidance of terminal prepositions, *ain’t*, and *It’s me*. In Chapter 9 we examine in more detail the later developments of this comparatively recent tradition, which would be—as Shakespeare says of drunken carousing in Denmark—more honored in the breach than the observance.

NOUNS

The actual grammar of early Modern English differed in only relatively minor respects from that of either late Middle English or our own time. There was nothing striking to distinguish the grammar of Shakespeare, Milton, and the eighteenth-century novelists from that of fourteenth-century Chaucer or twentieth-century Doris Lessing. Yet many grammatical changes occurred during the three hundred years between 1500 and 1800, some of them in nouns.

As we have seen, by the end of the Middle English period *-es* had been extended to practically all nouns as a genitive singular and caseless plural suffix.

As a result, most nouns had only two forms (*sister*, *sisters*), as they do today in speech. The use of the apostrophe to distinguish the written forms of the genitive singular (*sister's*) and plural (*sisters'*) was not widely adopted until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, respectively.

IRREGULAR PLURALS

The handful of mutated-vowel plurals for the most part resisted the analogical principle, so that *feet*, *geese*, *teeth*, *lice*, *mice*, *men*, and *women* have survived to the present and show no tendency to give way to -s plurals. A few -n plurals remained in early Modern English, including *eyen* 'eyes,' *shoon* 'shoes,' *kine* 'cows,' *brethren*, *children*, and *oxen*. The first two are now obsolete; *kine* continues to eke out a precarious existence as an archaic poetic word; and *brethren* has a very limited currency, confined in serious use mainly to certain religious and fraternal groups. In *kine*, *brethren*, and *children*, the *n* had not been present in Old English but was added by analogy with other -n plurals. The regularly developed *ky* and *childer*, which go back, respectively, to Old English *cȳ* and *cildru*, were current until fairly recently in the dialects of north England and of Scotland. *Brethren* (Old English *brōðor* or *brōðru*) also added an *n* by analogy and introduced a mutated vowel that did not occur in the Old English plural. *Oxen* is thus the only "pure" survival of the Old English weak declension, which formed nominative-accusative plurals with the suffix -an.

Uninflected plurals still survive from Old and Middle English times in *deer*, *sheep*, *swine*, *folk*, and *kind*. Analogical *folks* occurred very early in the Modern English period. *Kind* has acquired a new -s plural because of the feeling that the older construction was a "grammatical error," despite the precedent of its use in "these (those, all) kind of" by Shakespeare, Dryden, Swift, Goldsmith, Austen, and others. Its synonym *sort*, which is not of Old English origin, acquired an uninflected plural as early as the sixteenth century by analogy with *kind*, as in "these (those, all) sort of," but this construction is also frowned upon by prescriptivists, despite its use by Swift, Fielding, Austen, Dickens, Trollope, Wells, and others (Jespersen, *Modern English Grammar* 2:68). *Horse* retained its historical uninflected plural, as in Chaucer's "His hors were Goode" (*Canterbury Tales*, General Prologue) and Shakespeare's "Come on, then, horse and chariots let us have" (*Titus Andronicus*), until the seventeenth century, though the analogical plural *horses* had begun to occur as early as the thirteenth. Doubtless by analogy with *deer*, *sheep*, and the like, the names of other creatures that had -s plurals in earlier times came to have uninflected plurals—for example, *fish* and *fowl*, particularly when these are regarded as game. Barnyard creatures take the -s (*fowls*, *ducks*, *pigs*, and so forth); and Jesus Christ distributed to the multitude "a few little *fishes*" (Matthew 15.34). But one shoots (wild) *fowl* and *duck* and catches *fish*. The uninflected plural may be extended to the names of quite un-English beasts, like *antelope* and *buffalo* ("a herd of buffalo").

HIS-GENITIVE

A remarkable construction is the use of *his*, *her*, and *their* as signs of the genitive (*his-genitive*), as in "Augustus his daughter" (E. K.'s gloss to Spenser's *Shepherds' Calendar*, 1579), "Elizabeth Holland her howse" (State Papers, 1546), and "the

House of Lords their proceedings” (Pepys’s *Diary*, 1667). This use began in Old English times but had its widest currency in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as in Shakespeare’s “And art not thou Poinès, his Brother?” (2 *Henry IV*) and in the “Prayer for All Conditions of Men” in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer: “And this we beg for Jesus Christ his sake.”

The use of possessive pronouns as genitive markers seems to have had a double origin. On the one hand, it may have arisen from the sort of topic-comment construction that we still have in present-day English: “My brother—his main interest is football.” Such a construction would have provided a way in Old English to indicate possession for foreign proper names and for other expressions in which the inflected genitive was awkward. The oldest examples we have are from King Alfred’s ninth-century translation of the history of the world by Orosius: “Nilus seo ea hire æwielme is neh þæm clife,” that is, ‘Nile, the river—her source is near the cliff,’ and “Affrica and Asia hiera landgemircu onginnað of Alexandria,” that is, ‘Africa and Asia—their boundaries start from Alexandria.’ An early example with *his* is from Ælfric’s translation of the Book of Numbers (made about the year 1000): “We gesawon Enac his cynryn,” that is, ‘We saw Anak’s kindred.’

On the other hand, many English speakers came to regard the historical genitive ending *-s* as a variant of *his*. In its unstressed pronunciation, *his* was and is still pronounced without an [h], so that “Tom bets his salary” and “Tom Betts’s salary” are identical in pronunciation. Once speakers began to think of “Mars’s armor” as a variant of “Mars his armor,” an association doubtless reinforced by the use of the latter construction from early times as mentioned above, they started to spell the genitive ending *-s* as *his* (Wyld 314–5; Jespersen, *Modern English Grammar* 6: 301–2).

That genitive *-s* was confused with *his* is shown by the occasional use of *his* with females, as in “Mrs. Sands his maid” (*OED*, 1607), and by the mixture of the two spellings, as in “Job’s patience, Moses his meekness, Abraham’s faith” (*OED*, 1568). In the latter example, *his* was used when the genitive ending was pronounced as an extra syllable, and *’s* when it was not, the apostrophe also suggesting that the genitive *-s* was regarded as a contraction of *his*. Other spellings for both *his* and the genitive ending were *is* and *ys*, as in “Harlesdon ys name” and “her Grace is requeste,” that is, ‘her Grace’s request’ (Wyld 315).

His (with its variants *is* and *ys*) was much more common in this construction than *her* or *their*. The *his*-genitive, whichever pronoun is used, was most prevalent with proper names and especially after sibilants, as in *Mars*, *Moses*, *Sands*, and *Grace*, an environment in which the genitive ending is homophonous with the unstressed pronunciation of *his*. Although the *his*-genitive in Old English must have been the sort of topic-comment construction cited above, its early Modern English frequency was certainly due, at least in part, to a confusion of inflectional *-s* and *his*. The construction has survived, archaically, in printed bookplates: “John Smith His Book.”

GROUP GENITIVE

The **group-genitive** construction, as in “King Priam of Troy’s son” and “The Wife of Bath’s Tale,” is a development of the early Modern English period. “Group” in

the term for this construction refers to the fact that the genitive 's is added, not to the noun to which it relates most closely, but rather to whatever word ends a phrase including such a noun. Though there were sporadic occurrences of this construction in Middle English, the usual older idiom is illustrated by Chaucer's "the kyng Priamus sone of Troye" and "The Wyves Tale of Bathe," or its variant "The Wyf of Bathe Hire Tale" with a *his*-genitive (in this case, *hire* for 'her'). What has happened is that a phrase has been taken as a unit, and the sign of the genitive is affixed to the last word of the phrase. The construction also occurs with a pronoun plus *else*, as in "everybody else's," and with nouns connected by a coordinating conjunction, as in "Kenyon and Knott's *Pronouncing Dictionary*" and "an hour or two's time." There are comparatively few literary examples of clauses so treated, but in everyday speech such constructions as "the little boy that lives down the street's dog" and "the woman I live next door to's husband" are frequent. "He is the woman who is the best friend this club has ever had's husband" is an extreme example from Gracie Allen, an early radio and television comedian noted for her confusing speech.

An inflection is added to a word and goes with that word semantically and grammatically. As a consequence of the group genitive, the morpheme we spell 's has ceased to be an inflection and has instead become a grammatical particle always pronounced as part of the preceding word (an **enclitic**), although syntactically it goes with a whole preceding phrase, not with that word alone. Of all the Old English inflectional endings, *-es* (the origin of our 's) has had the most unusual historical development: it has broken off from the nouns to which it was originally added and moved up to the level of phrases, where it functions syntactically like a word on that higher level, although it continues to be pronounced as a mere word ending.

UNINFLECTED GENITIVE

In early Modern English an **uninflected genitive** occurred in a number of special circumstances, especially for some nouns that were feminine in Old English and occasionally for nouns ending in [s] or preceding words beginning with [s]—for example, *for conscience sake* and *for God sake*. A few uninflected genitives, though not generally recognized as such, survive to the present day in reference to the Virgin Mary—for example, *Lady Day* (that is, Our Lady's Day 'Feast of the Annunciation'), *Lady Chapel* (Our Lady's Chapel), and *ladybird* (Our Lady's bird). Sometimes an uninflected genitive was used as an alternative to the group genitive, as in "the duke of Somerset dowther [daughter]." The uninflected genitive of present-day African-American English (for example, "my brother car"), although of different historical origin, has re-created a structure that was once a part of general English usage.

ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

The distinction between strong and weak adjective forms, already greatly simplified by the Middle English loss of the final *n*, completely disappeared with the further

loss of [ə] from the end of words. The loss of final [ə] also eliminated the distinction between plural and singular adjectives. Although the letter *e*, which represented the schwa vowel in spelling, continued to be written in many words, often haphazardly, adjectives no longer had grammatical categories of number or definiteness. The Modern English adjective thus came to be invariable in form. The only words that still agree in number with the nouns they modify are the demonstratives *this–these* and *that–those*.

Adjectives and adverbs continued to form comparatives with *-er* and superlatives with *-est*, but increasingly they used **analytical comparison** with *mo(e)* or *more* and with *most*, which had occurred as early as Old English times. The form *mo(e)*, from Old English *mā*, continued in use through the early Modern English period, as in Robert Greene's *A Maiden's Dream* (1591): "No foreign wit could Hatton's overgo: Yet to a friend wise, simple, and no mo." It even lasted into the nineteenth century in Byron's *Childe Harold* (1812): "Ye . . . Shall find some tidings in a future page, If he that rhymeth now may scribble moe." The homophonous and synonymous *mo'* of African-American English has a different origin but is similar in use.

The present stylistic objection to affixing *-er* and *-est* to polysyllables had somewhat less force in the early Modern English period, when forms like *eminenter*, *impudentest*, and *beautifullest* are not particularly hard to find, nor, for that matter, are monosyllables with *more* and *most*, like *more near*, *more fast*, *most poor*, and *most foul*. As was true in earlier times also, a good many instances of **double comparison** like *more fitter*, *more better*, *more fairer*, *most worst*, *most stillest*, and (probably the best-known example) *most unkindest* occur in early Modern English. Comparison could be made with the ending or with the modifying word or, for emphasis, with both.

Many adverbs that now must end in *-ly* did not require the suffix in early Modern English times. The works of Shakespeare furnish many typical examples: *grievous sick*, *indifferent cold*, *wondrous strange*, and *passing* ['surpassingly'] *fair*. Note also the use of *sure* in the following citations, which some nowadays would condemn as "bad English": "If she come in, shee'l sure speake to my wife" (*Othello*); "And sure deare friends my thankes are too deare a halfepeny" (*Hamlet*); "Sure the Gods doe this yeere connive at us" (*Winter's Tale*).

PRONOUNS

Important changes happened in the pronouns, which are the most highly inflected part of speech in present-day English, thus preserving the earlier synthetic character of our language in a small way.

PERSONAL PRONOUNS

The early Modern English personal pronouns are shown in the accompanying table.

PERSONAL PRONOUNS OF EARLY MODERN ENGLISH

	Nominative	Objective	Possessive	
			Attributive	Nominal
<i>Singular</i>				
1 pers.	I	me		my/mine
2 pers.	thou	thee		thy/thine
3 pers., masc.	he, a	him		his
fem.	she	her	her	hers
neut.	(h)it	(h)it		his, it, its
<i>Plural</i>				
1 pers.	we	us	our	ours
2 pers.	ye/you	you/ye	your	yours
3 pers.	they	them, (h)em	their	theirs

I came to be capitalized, not through any egotism, but only because lower-case *i* standing alone was likely to be overlooked, being the smallest letter of the alphabet.

In the first and second persons singular, the distinction between *my* and *mine* and between *thy* and *thine* was purely phonological (like the distinction between *a* and *an*), as it had been in Middle English since the thirteenth century; that is, *mine* and *thine* were used before a vowel, *h*, or a pause, and *my* and *thy* before a consonant. This distinction continued to be made until the eighteenth century, when *my* became the only regular first person possessive used attributively (as in “my ear,” earlier “mine ear”). Thereafter *mine* was restricted to use as a nominal (as in “That is mine,” “Mine is here,” and “Put it on mine”), just as the “*s*-forms” *hers*, *ours*, *yours*, *theirs* had been since late Middle English times.

The distinction between attributive and nominal possessive forms thus spread through most of the personal pronoun system. Today the only exceptions are *his*, which uses the same form for both functions, and *its*, which has no nominal function: we do not usually say things like *“That is its” or *“Its is here.” (The asterisk before a present-day form, as in the preceding, indicates that the form does not exist, or at least that the writer believes it to be abnormal. This use of the asterisk thus differs from that before historical reconstructions, where it means that the form is not recorded although it or something like it probably did once exist. The two uses agree in indicating that the form so marked is not attested.)

When the distinction between possessives with and without *n* was phonological, a confusion sometimes arose about which word the *n* belonged with. The Fool’s *nuncle* in *King Lear* is due to his misunderstanding of *mine uncle* as *my nuncle*, and it is likely that *Ned*, *Nelly*, and *Noll* (a nickname associated with Oliver Goldsmith) have the same origin from *mine Edward*, *mine Eleanor*, and *mine Oliver*. The confusion is similar to that which today produces *a (whole) nother* from *another* (that is, *an other*).

The loss in ordinary language of singular *thou*, *thee*, and *thy/thine* created a gap in the pronoun system that we have not yet repaired. That loss began with

a shift in the use of *thou* and *ye* forms. As early as the late thirteenth century, the plural forms *ye*, *you*, and *your* began to be used with singular meaning in circumstances of politeness or formality, leaving the singular forms (*thou*, *thee*, *thy/thine*) for intimate, familiar use. In imitation of the French use of *vous* and *tu*, the English historically plural *y*-forms were used in addressing a superior, whether by virtue of social status or age, and in upper-class circles among equals, though highborn lovers might slip into the *th*-forms in situations of intimacy. The *th*-forms were also used by older to younger and by socially superior to socially inferior. The distinction is retained in other languages, which may even have a verb meaning ‘to use the singular form’—for example, French *tutoyer*, Spanish *tutear*, Italian *tuizzare*, German *dutzen*. Late Middle English had *thoute*, with the same meaning.

In losing this distinction, English obviously has lost a useful device, which our older writers frequently employed with artistic discrimination, as in *Hamlet*:

Qu[een] Hamlet, thou hast thy Father much offended.
 Ham[let] Mother, you have my Father much offended.
 Qu[een] Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.

...

Qu[een] What wilt thou do? thou wilt not murder me?

The Queen’s *thou* in the first line is what a parent would be expected to say to her child. Hamlet’s “Mother, you have ...” is appropriate from a son to his mother, but there is more than a hint of a rebuff in her choice of the more formal pronoun in “Come, come, you answer ...,” and her return to *thou* in the last line suggests that, in her alarm at Hamlet’s potential violence, she is reminding him of the parental relationship.

Elsewhere also Shakespeare chooses the *y*-forms and the *th*-forms with artistic care, though it is sometimes difficult for a present-day reader, unaccustomed to the niceties offered by a choice of forms, to figure him out, as in the dialogue between two servants, the less imaginative Curtis and the sardonic Grumio, in *The Taming of the Shrew*:

Cur[tis] Doe you heare ho? you must meete my maister to countenance my mistris.
 Gru[mio] Why she hath a face of her owne.
 Cur[tis] Who knowes not that?
 Gru[mio] Thou it seemes....

Curtis uses the polite *you* to Grumio, but when Curtis fails to understand Grumio’s pun on *countenance* as a verb ‘to give support to’ and a noun ‘face,’ Grumio responds with *thou*, which a superior uses to an inferior. However, the English did not always use the two forms as consistently as the French. Sometimes they seem to be random.

The *th*-forms, which had become quite rare in upper-class speech by the sixteenth century, were completely lost in standard English in the eighteenth, though they have lingered on in some dialects. We are familiar with them mainly in poetry and religious language, especially the King James Bible. A few older-generation members of the Society of Friends (Quakers) may still use *th*-forms when speaking to one another, with *thee* serving as both subject and object.

The third person singular masculine and feminine pronouns have been relatively stable since late Old English times. The unstressed form of *he* was often written *a*, as in “Now might I doe it, but now a is a-praying, / And now Ile doo’t, and so a goes to heaven” from the Second Quarto of *Hamlet*. (The Folio has *he* in both instances.) *She* and *her(s)* show no change since Middle English times.

In the neuter, however, an important change took place in the later part of the sixteenth century, when the new possessive form *its* arose. The older nominative and objective *hit* had lost its *h*- when unstressed; then the *h*-less form came to be used in stressed as well as unstressed positions—though, as has already been pointed out, *hit*, the form preferred by Queen Elizabeth I, remains in nonstandard speech as a stressed form. The old neuter possessive *his* was still usual in the early years of the seventeenth century, as in Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*: “But value dwels not in particular will, / It holds his estimate and dignitie.” The *OED* cites an American example from 1634: “Boston is two miles North-east from Roxberry: His situation is very pleasant.”

Perhaps because of its ambiguity, *his* was to some extent avoided as a neuter possessive even in Middle English times: an uninflected *it* occurs from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, and to this day in British dialect usage. The *OED*’s latest citation of it in standard English is from 1622: “Each part as faire doth show / In it kind, as white in Snow.” Other efforts to replace the ambiguous *his* as a possessive for *it* include paraphrases with *thereof*, as in “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof” (Psalm 24), and *of it*, as in “Great was the fall of it” (Matthew 7). The present-day form *its* (at first written *it’s*, as many people still write it) began to be used by analogy with other possessives ending in *’s*. *Its* is quite rare in Shakespeare and occurs only twice in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*; but by the end of the seventeenth century, *its* had become the usual form, completely displacing the other options.

Similar to the use of the second person plural form to refer to a single person is the “regal *we*,” except that it implies a sense of one’s own importance rather than someone else’s. It has been used in proclamations by a sovereign, and to judge by older drama, it was even used in royal conversation. Queen Victoria is said to be the last monarch to employ it as a spoken form, as in her famous but doubtless apocryphal reproof to one of her maids of honor who had told a mildly improper story: “We are not amused.” The “editorial *we*” dates from Old English times. It is sometimes used by one who is a member of a staff of writers, all assumed to share the same opinions. It may also be used to include one’s readers in phrases like “as we have seen.”

In the second person plural, the old distinction between nominative *ye* and objective *you* was still maintained in the King James Bible—for example, “And ye shall know the Trueth, and the Trueth shall make you free” (John 8). It was, however, generally lost during the sixteenth century, when some writers made the distinction, while others did not (Wyld 330). In time the objective *you* completely replaced *ye* in standard English.

Present-day nonstandard speech distinguishes singular and plural *you* in a number of ways; examples include the nonstandard, analogical *youse* of northern American urbanites (also current in Irish English) and the southern mountain *you-uns* (that is, *you ones*), which probably stems from Scots English. *You-all* (or *y’all*)

is in educated colloquial use in the Southern states and is the only new second person plural to have acquired respectability in Modern English. *You guys* is a recent gender-unspecific candidate, as is *you lot* among the British, though the last has patronizing implications.

From the later seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth, many speakers made a distinction between singular *you was* and plural *you were*. James Boswell used singular *you was* throughout his *London Journal* (1762–3) and even reported it as coming from the lips of Dr. Johnson: “Indeed, when you was in the irreligious way, I should not have been pleased with you” (July 28, 1763); but in the second edition of his *Life of Johnson*, he changed over to *you were* for both singular and plural. Bishop Robert Lowth, in his very influential *Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762), condemned *you was* in no uncertain terms as “an enormous Solecism,” but George Campbell testified in his *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776) that “it is ten times oftener heard.” *You was* at one time was very common in cultivated American use also: George Philip Krapp (*English Language in America* 2:261) cites its use by John Adams in a letter of condolence to a friend whose house had burned down: “You regret your loss; but why? Was you fond of seeing or thinking that others saw and admired so stately a pile?” The construction became unfashionable in the early nineteenth century.

In the third person plural, the native *h*-forms had become archaic by the end of the fifteenth century, when the *th*-forms (*they*, *them*, *their*, *theirs*) gradually took over. The single *h*-form to survive is the one earlier written *hem*, and it survives only as an unstressed form, written *’em* when it is written at all. The plural possessives in *h*- (*here*, *her*, *hir*) occurred only very rarely after the beginning of the sixteenth century.

RELATIVE AND INTERROGATIVE PRONOUNS

The usual Old English relative particle was *þe*, which had only one form. It is a pity that it was ever lost. Middle English adapted the neuter demonstrative pronoun *that*, without inflection, for the same relative function, later adding the previously interrogative *which*, sometimes preceded by *the*, and also uninflected. It was not until the sixteenth century that the originally interrogative *who* (OE *hwā*) came to be commonly used as a simple relative to refer to persons. It had somewhat earlier been put to use as an indefinite relative, that is, as the equivalent of present *who(m)ever*, a use now rare but one that can be seen in Shakespeare’s “Who tels me true, though in his Tale lye death, / I heare him as he flatter’d” (*Antony and Cleopatra*) and Byron’s “Whom the gods love die young” (*Don Juan*). The King James Bible, which we should expect to be a little behind the times in its grammar, has *which* where today we would use *who*, as in “The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field” (Matthew 13) and in “Our Father which art in heaven.” This translation was the work of almost fifty theological scholars appointed by James I, and it was afterward reviewed by the bishops and other eminent scholars. It is not surprising that these men should have been little given to anything that smacked of innovation. Shakespeare, who with all his daring as a coiner and user of words was essentially conservative in his syntax, also uses *which* in the older fashion to refer to persons and things alike, as in “he which hath your Noble Father slaine” (*Hamlet*).

CASE FORMS OF THE PRONOUNS

In the freewheeling usage of earlier days, there was less concern than now with what are thought to be “proper” case forms. English had to wait until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for the rise of a prescriptive attitude toward language, which is a relatively new thing. After a coordinating conjunction, for instance, the nominative form tended to occur invariably, as indeed it still does, whether the pronoun is object of verb or preposition or second element of a compound subject. H. C. Wyld (332) cites “with you and I” from a letter by Sir John Suckling, to which may be added Shakespeare’s “all debts are cleerd betweene you and I” (*Merchant of Venice*). No doubt at the present time the desire to be “correct” causes many speakers who may have been reproved as children for saying “Mary and me went downtown” to use “Mary and I” under all circumstances; but hypercorrectness is hardly a satisfactory explanation for the phenomenon because it occurs in the writings of well-bred people from the sixteenth to the early eighteenth centuries, a period when people of consequence talked pretty much as they pleased.

Prescriptive grammar requires the nominative form after *as* and *than* in such sentences as “Is she as tall as me?” (*Antony and Cleopatra*). Boswell, who wrote in a period when men of strong minds and characters were attempting to “regularize” the English language, shows no particular pattern of consistency in this construction. In the entry in his *London Journal* for June 5, 1763, he writes “I was much stronger than her,” but elsewhere uses the nominative form in the same construction. The basic question for grammarians is whether *than* and *as* are to be regarded as prepositions, which would require the objective form consistently, or as subordinating conjunctions, after which the choice of case form should be determined by expanding the construction, as in “I know him better than she (knows him)” or “I know him better than (I know) her.” Present-day prescriptivists opt for the second analysis, but speakers tend to follow either, as the spirit moves them.

In early Modern English, the nominative and objective forms of the personal pronouns, particularly *I* and *me*, tend to occur more or less indiscriminately after the verb *be*. In *Twelfth Night*, for instance, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, who, though a fool, is yet a gentleman, uses both forms within a few lines: “That’s mee I warrant you. . . . I knew ’twas I.” The generally inconsistent state of things is exemplified by Shakespeare’s use of other pronouns as well: “I am not thee” (*Timon of Athens*); “you are not he” (*Love’s Labour’s Lost*); “And damn’d be him, that first cries hold, enough” (*Macbeth*); “you are she” (*Twelfth Night*). In “Here’s them” (*Pericles*), *them* is functionally the subject, but the speaker is a fisherman.

Today also objective personal pronouns continue to occur after *be*, though not without bringing down upon the head of the user the thunder of those who regard themselves as guardians of the language. There are nevertheless a great many speakers of standard English who do not care and who say “It’s me” when there is occasion to do so, despite the doctrine that “the verb *to be* can never take an object.” There is little point in labeling the construction colloquial or informal as contrasted with a supposedly formal “It is I,” inasmuch as the utterance would not be likely to occur alone anywhere except in conversation. If a following relative clause has *am*, “It is I” would be usual, as in “It is I who am responsible,” though “It is me” occurs before other relative clauses, as in “It’s me who’s responsible” and “It is

me that he's hunting." What has been said of *me* after forms of *be* applies also to *us*, *him*, *her*, and *them*.

The "proper" choice between *who* and *whom*, whether interrogative or relative, frequently involves an intellectual chore that many speakers from about 1500 on have been little concerned with. The interrogative pronoun, coming as it usually does before the verb, tended in early Modern English to be invariably *who*, as it still does in unselfconscious speech. Otto Jespersen cites interrogative *who* as object before the verb from Marlowe, Greene, Ben Jonson, the old *Spectator* of Addison and Steele, Goldsmith, and Sheridan, with later examples from Thackeray, Mrs. Humphry Ward, and Shaw. Alexander Schmidt's *Shakespeare-Lexicon* furnishes fifteen quotations for interrogative *who* in this construction and then adds an "etc.," though, as Jespersen (*Modern English Grammar* 7:242) points out, "Most modern editors and reprinters add the *-m* everywhere in accordance with the rules of 'orthodox' grammar." Compare his earlier and somewhat bitter statement that they show thereby "that they hold in greater awe the schoolmasters of their own childhood than the poet of all the ages" (*Progress in Language* 216). It is an amusing irony that *whom*-sleuths, imagining that they are great traditionalists, are actually adhering to a fairly recent standard as far as the period from the fifteenth century on is concerned. In view of the facts, such a sentence as "Who are you waiting for?" can hardly be considered untraditional.

Relative *who* as object of verb or preposition is also frequent. For Shakespeare, Schmidt uses the label "etc." after citing a dozen instances, and Jespersen cites from a few other authors. The *OED* reports that *whom* as an object is "no longer current in natural colloquial speech." There are, however, a good many instances of *whom* for the nominative, especially as a relative that may be taken as the object of the main-clause verb, as in Matthew 16: "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" Both Shakespeare's "Whom in constancie you thinke stands so safe" (*Cymbeline*) and "Yong Ferdinand (whom they suppose is droun'd)" (*Tempest*) would be condemned by all prescriptive grammarians nowadays. But Shakespeare, who is representative of early Modern English, uses such constructions alongside others with the "approved" form of the construction, such as "I should do Brutus wrong, and Cassius wrong: / who (you all know) are Honourable men" (*Julius Caesar*). The "incorrect" use of *whom* occurs very frequently during the whole Modern English period. Jespersen, whose *Modern English Grammar* is a storehouse of illustrative material, has many examples ranging from Chaucer to the present day (3:198–9), and Sir Ernest Gowers cites instances from E. M. Forster, Lord David Cecil, the *Times*, and Somerset Maugham, all of which might be presumed to be standard English.

VERBS

CLASSES OF STRONG VERBS

Throughout the history of English, strong verbs—always a minority—have fought a losing battle, either joining the ranks of the weak verbs or being lost altogether. In those strong verbs that survive, the Old English four principal parts (infinitive, preterit singular, preterit plural, past participle) have been reduced to three, with

the new preterit from either the old singular or the old plural. Only a few verbs show regular development, so the orderly arrangement into classes that prevailed in the older periods is now history. Indeed, today the distinction between strong and weak verbs is less important than that between regular verbs, all of which are weak (like *talk*, *talked*, *talked*), and irregular verbs, which may be either strong (like *sing*, *sang*, *sung*) or weak (like *think*, *thought*, *thought*). The following brief account of the Modern English development of the seven classes of Old English strong verbs is thus now a purely historical matter.

Class I remains rather clearly defined. The regular development of this class, with the Modern English preterit from the old preterit singular, is illustrated by the following:

drive	drove	driven
ride	rode	ridden
rise	rose	risen
smite	smote	smitten
stride	strode	stridden
strive	strove	striven
thrive	throve	thriven
write	wrote	written

Also phonologically regular, but with the Modern English preterit from the old preterit plural (whose vowel was identical with that of the past participle), are the following, of which *chide* and *hide* are originally weak verbs that have become strong by analogy:

bite	bit	bitten
chide	chid	chidden
hide	hid	hidden
slide	slid	slid(den)

The following verbs, on the contrary, have a vowel in the preterit and past participle derived from the old preterit singular:

abide	abode	abode
shine	shone	shone

Dive–dove (dived)–dived is another weak verb that has acquired a strong preterit. *Strike–struck–struck* has a preterit of uncertain origin; the regularly developed past participle *stricken* is now used only metaphorically.

In early Modern English many of these verbs had alternative forms, some of which survive either in standard use or in the dialects, whereas others are now archaic. There is a Northern form for the preterit of *drive* in “And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians . . . and drave them out from before you” (Judges 6). Other now nonstandard forms are represented by “And the people chode [chided] with Moses” (Numbers 20) and “I imagined that your father had wrote in such a way” (Boswell, *London Journal*, December 30, 1762). Other verbs of

this class have become weak (for example, *glide*, *gripe*, *spew*, and *writhe*). Still others have disappeared altogether from the language.

The verbs of Class II have likewise undergone many changes in the course of their development into their present forms. Only a handful survive, of which the following have taken their preterit vowel from the old past participle:

choose	chose	chosen
cleave	clove	cloven
freeze	froze	frozen

Fly–flew–flown has a preterit formed perhaps by analogy with Class VII verbs.

A development of the Old English past participle of *freeze* is used as an archaism in Shelley's "Snow-fed streams now seen athwart frore [frozen] vapours," which the OED suggests is a reflection of Milton's "The parching Air Burns frore" (*Paradise Lost*). Other variant forms are in "This word (Rebellion) it had froze them up" (2 *Henry IV*); "O what a time have you chose out brave Caius / To weare a Kerchiefe" (*Julius Caesar*); and "Certain men clave to Paul" (Acts 17).

The following surviving verbs of Class II are now weak: *bow* 'bend,' *brew*, *chew*, *creep*, *crowd*, *flee*, *lie* 'prevaricate,' *lose*, *reek*, *rue*, *seethe*, *shove*, *sprout*, and *suck*. *Sodden*, the old strong participle of *seethe* (with voicing according to Verner's Law), is still sometimes used as an adjective. *Crope*, a strong preterit of *creep*, occurs in formal English as late as the eighteenth century and in folk speech to the present day.

Practically all verbs of Class III with nasal consonants that have survived from Old English have retained their strong inflection. The following derive their preterit from the old preterit singular:

begin	began	begun
drink	drank	drunk
ring	rang	rung
shrink	shrank	shrunk
sing	sang	sung
sink	sank	sunk
spring	sprang	sprung
stink	stank	stunk
swim	swam	swum

In *run–ran–run* (ME infinitive *rinnen*) the vowel of the participle was in early Modern English extended into the present tense; *run* is otherwise like the preceding verbs. In the following, the modern preterit vowel is from the old preterit plural and past participle:

cling	clung	clung
slink	slunk	slunk
spin	spun	spun
sting	stung	stung
swing	swung	swung
win	won	won
wring	wrung	wrung

A few verbs entering the language after Old English times have conformed to this pattern—for example, *fling*, *sling*, and *string*. By the same sort of analogy, the

weak verb *bring* has acquired in nonstandard speech the strong preterit and participial form *brung*. Though lacking the nasal, *dig* (not of Old English origin) and *stick*, which at first had weak inflection, have taken on the same pattern.

The consonant cluster *-nd* had early lengthened a preceding vowel, so the principal parts of the following verbs, although quite different in their vowels from those of the preceding group, have the same historical development:

bind	bound	bound
find	found	found
grind	ground	ground
wind	wound	wound

Allowing for the influence of Middle English [ç, x] (spelled *h* or *gh*) on a preceding vowel, *fight–fought–fought* also has a regular development into Modern English. All other surviving verbs of this class have become weak (some having done so in Middle English times): *bark*, *braid*, *burn*, *burst* (also with an invariant preterit and participle), *carve*, *climb*, *delve*, *help*, *melt*, *mourn*, *spurn*, *starve*, *swallow*, *swell*, *yell*, *yelp*, and *yield*. The old participial forms *molten* and *swollen* are still used but only as adjectives. *Holp*, an old strong preterit of *help*, was common until the seventeenth century and survives in current nonstandard usage. The old participial form *holpen* is used in the King James Bible—for instance, in “He hath holpen his servant Israel” (Luke 1).

Most surviving Class IV verbs have borrowed the vowel of the old past participle for their preterit:

break	broke	broken
speak	spoke	spoken
steal	stole	stolen
weave	wove	woven

Verbs with an [r] after the vowel follow the same pattern, although the [r] has affected the quality of the preceding vowel in the infinitive:

bear	bore	borne
shear	shore	shorn
swear	swore	sworn
tear	tore	torn
wear	wore	worn

The last was originally a weak verb; it acquired strong principal parts by analogy with the verbs of Class IV that it rimed with.

Get was a loanword from Scandinavian. It and *tread* (like *speak*, originally a Class V verb) have shortened vowels in all their principal parts:

get	got	got(ten)
tread	trod	trodden

Come–came–come has regular phonological development from the Middle English verb, whose principal parts were, however, already irregular in form. A variant preterit *come* was frequent in early Modern English—for example, in Pepys’s

Diary: “Creed come and dined with me” (June 15, 1666), although Pepys also uses *came*; today the variant occurs mainly in folk speech. Variant preterits for other verbs were also common in early Modern English, as in “When I was a child, I spake as a child” (I Corinthians 13); “And when he went forth to land, there met him . . . a certain man, which had devils long time, and ware no clothes” (Luke 8); “And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves” (Mark 6); “And they brought him unto him; and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him” (Mark 9).

Verbs of Class V have all diverged in one way or another from what might be considered regular development. *Eat*–*ate*–*eaten* has in its preterit a lengthened form of the vowel of the Middle English preterit singular (which, if it had survived into Modern English, would have been **at*). The preterit in British English, although it is spelled like the American form, is pronounced in a way that would be better represented as *et*; it is derived perhaps by analogy with the preterit *read*.

Bid and *forbid* have two preterits in current English. (*For*)*bade*, traditionally pronounced [bæd] but now often [bed] from the spelling, was originally a lengthened form of the Middle English preterit singular. The preterit (*for*)*bid* has its vowel from the past participle, which, in turn, probably borrowed it from the present stem, by analogy with verbs that have the same vowel in those two forms.

Give–*gave*–*given* is a Scandinavian loanword that displaced the native English form. (The latter appears, for example, in Chaucer’s use as *yeven*–*yaf*–*yeven*.) Variants are evidenced by Pepys’s “This day I sent my cozen Roger a tierce of claret, which I give him” (August 21, 1667) and Shakespeare’s “When he did frown, O, had she then gave over” (*Venus and Adonis*).

Sit had in early Modern English the preterit forms *sat*, *sate*, and (occasionally) *sit*; its participial forms were *sitten*, *sit*, *sat*, and *sate*. *Sit* and *set* were confused as early as the fourteenth century, and continue to be. A nonstandard form *sot* occurs as preterit and participle of both verbs.

The confusion of *lie*–*lay*–*lain* and *lay*–*laid*–*laid* is as old as that of *sit* and *set*. The intransitive use of *lay*, according to the OED, “was not app[arently] regarded as a solecism” in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It has been so used by some very important writers, including Francis Bacon and Lord Byron—for example, in “There let him lay” (*Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*). The brothers H. W. and F. G. Fowler (49) cited with apparently delighted disapproval “I suspected him of having laid in wait for the purpose” from the writing of Richard Grant White, the eminent nineteenth-century American purist—for purists love above all to catch other purists in some supposed sin against English grammar. Today the two verbs are so thoroughly confused that their forms are often freely interchanged, as in the following description of a modern dancer, who “lay down again; then raised the upper part of his body once more and stared upstage at the brick wall; then laid down again” (*Illustrated London News*).

See–*saw*–*seen* has normal development of the Middle English forms of the verb. Some dialects have the alternative preterits *see*, *seed*, and *seen*.

Other surviving Class V verbs have become weak: *bequeath*, *fret*, *knead*, *mete*, *reap*, *scrape*, *weigh*, and *wreak*.

Some verbs from Class VI (including *take*, a Scandinavian loanword that ultimately ousted its Old English synonym *niman* from the language) show regular development:

forsake	forsook	forsaken
shake	shook	shaken
take	took	taken

Early Modern English frequently used the preterit of these verbs as a participle, as in Shakespeare's "Save what is had or must from you be took" (Sonnet 75), "Have from the forests shook three summers' pride" (Sonnet 104), and "Hath she forsooke so many Noble Matches?" (*Othello*). *Stand* (and the compound *understand*) has lost its old participle *standen*; the preterit form *stood* has served as a participle since the sixteenth century, though not exclusively. *Stand* also occurs as a participle, as does a weak form *standed*, as in "a tongue not understood of the people" in the fourteenth Article of Religion of the Anglican Communion. Two verbs of this class have formed their preterits by analogy with Class VII:

slay	slew	slain
draw	drew	drawn

Other surviving verbs of this class have become weak: *fare*, *flay*, *gnaw*, *(en)grave*, *heave*, *lade*, *laugh*, *shave*, *step*, *wade*, and *wash*. But strong participial forms *laden* and *shaven* survive as adjectives, and *heave* has an alternative strong preterit *hove*.

Several verbs of Class VII show regular development:

blow	blew	blown
grow	grew	grown
know	knew	known
throw	threw	thrown

Another, *crow*–*crew*–*crowed*, has a normally developed preterit that is now rare in American use, but it has only a weak participle. Two other verbs also have normal phonological development, although the vowels of their principal parts are different from those above:

fall	fell	fallen
beat	beat	beaten

Hold–*held*–*held* has borrowed its Modern English participle from the Middle English preterit. The original participle is preserved in the old-fashioned *beholden*. Modern English *hang*–*hung*–*hung* is a mixture of three Middle English verbs: *hōn* (Class VII), *hagen* (weak), and *hengen* (a Scandinavian loan). The alternative weak preterit and participle, *hanged*, is frequent in reference to capital punishment, though it is by no means universally so used.

Let, originally a member of this class, now has unchanged principal parts. Other verbs surviving from the group have become weak; two of them did so as early as Old English times: *dread*, *flow*, *fold*, *hew*, *leap*, *mow*, *read* (OE preterit *rædde*),

row, *sleep* (OE preterit *slēpte*), *sow*, *span* ‘join,’ *walk*, *wax* ‘grow,’ and *weep*. Strong participial forms *sown*, *mown*, and *hewn* survive, mainly as adjectives.

ENDINGS FOR PERSON AND NUMBER

The personal endings of early Modern English verbs were somewhat simplified from those of Middle English, with the loss of *-e* as an ending for the first person singular in the present indicative (making that form identical with the infinitive, which had lost its final *-n* and then its *-e*): *I sit* (to *sit*) from Middle English *ich sitte* (to *sitten*). Otherwise, however, the early Modern English verb preserved a number of personal endings that have since disappeared, and it had, especially early in the period, several variants for some of the persons:

	Present	Preterit
I	sit	sat
thou	sittest, sitst	sat, sattest, satst
he, she	sitteth, sits	sat
we, you, they	sit	sat

The early Modern English third person singular varied between *-(e)s* and *-(e)th*. From the beginning of the seventeenth century the *-s* form began to prevail, though for a while the two forms could be used interchangeably, particularly in verse, as in Shakespeare’s “Sometime she driveth ore a Souldiers necke, & then dreames he of cutting Forraine throats” (*Romeo and Juliet*). But *doth* and *bath* lasted until well into the eighteenth century, and the King James Bible uses only *-th* forms. The *-s* forms are due to Northern dialect influence.

Third person plural forms occasionally end in *-s*, also of Northern provenience, as in “Where lo, two lamps, burnt out, in darkness lies” (*Venus and Adonis*). These should not be regarded as “ungrammatical” uses of the singular for the plural form, although analogy with the singular may have played a part in extending the ending *-s* to the plural, as is certainly the case with the first and second persons of naive raconteurs—“I says” and “says I”—and of the rude expression of disbelief “Sez you!”

The early Modern English preterit ending for the second person singular, *-(e)st*, began to be lost in the sixteenth century. Thus the preterit tense became invariable, as it is today, except for the verb *be*.

The verb *be*, always the most irregular of English verbs, had the following personal inflections in the early Modern period:

	Present	Preterit
I	am	was
thou	art	were, wast, werst, wert
he, she	is	was
we, you, they	are, be	were

The plural *be* was widely current as late as the seventeenth century; Eilert Ekwall (*History of Modern English Sounds and Morphology* 118) cites “the powers

that be” as a survival of it. The preterit second person singular was *were* until the sixteenth century, when the forms *wast*, *werst*, and *wert* began to occur, the last remaining current in literature throughout the eighteenth century. Nineteenth-century poets were also very fond of it (“Bird thou never wert”); it gave a certain archaically spiritual tone to their writing that they presumably considered desirable. *Wast* and *wert* are by analogy with present-tense *art*. In *werst*, the *s* of *wast* has apparently been extended. The locution *you was* is covered earlier (167–8).

Of the other highly irregular verbs, little need be said. *Could*, the preterit of *can*, acquired its unetymological *l* in the sixteenth century by analogy with *would* and *should*. Early Modern English forms that differed from those now current are *durst* (surviving only in dialect use) as preterit of *dare*, which otherwise had become weak; *mought*, a variant of *might*; and *mowe*, an occasional present plural form of *may*. *Will* had early variants *wull* and *woll*.

CONTRACTED FORMS

Most of our verbs with contracted *-n’t* first occur in writing in the seventeenth century. It is likely that all were spoken long before ever getting written down, for **contractions** are in their very nature colloquial and thus are infrequent in writing. *Won’t* is from *wol(l) not*. *Don’t* presents several problems. One would expect the pronunciation [dunt] from *do* [du] plus the contracted [nt] for *not*. Jespersen (1909–49, 5:431) suggests that the [o] of *don’t* is analogical with that of *won’t*. Whatever the origin of [o] in *don’t*, the *OED* records third person *don’t* in 1670, but *doesn’t* not until 1818. It appears that *it don’t* is not a “corruption” of *it doesn’t*, but the older form. The *OED* derives third person *don’t* from *he (she, it) do*, and it cites instances of the latter from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including Pepys’s “Sir Arthur Haselrigge do not yet appear in the House” (March 2, 1660).

An’t [ænt] for *am (are, is) not* is apparently of late seventeenth-century origin; the variant *ain’t* occurs about a century later. With the eighteenth-century British English shifting of [æ] to [a] as in *ask*, *path*, *dance*, and the like, the pronunciation of *an’t* shifted to [ant]. At the same time, preconsonantal [r] was lost, thus making *an’t* and *aren’t* homophones. As a result, the two words were confused, even by those, including most Americans, who pronounce *r* before a consonant. *Aren’t I?* (originally a mistake for *an’t I?* ‘am I not?’) has gained ground among those who regard *ain’t* as a linguistic mortal sin. Although *ain’t* has fallen victim to a series of schoolteachers’ crusades, Henry Alford (1810–71), dean of Canterbury, testified that in his day “It ain’t certain” and “I ain’t going” were “very frequently used, even by highly educated persons,” and Frederick James Furnivall (1825–1910), an early editor of the *OED* and founder of the Chaucer Society and the Early English Text Society, is said to have used the form *ain’t* habitually (Jespersen 1909–49, 5:434). Despite its current reputation as a shibboleth of uneducated speech, *ain’t* is still used by many cultivated speakers in informal circumstances.

Contractions of auxiliary verbs without *not* occur somewhat earlier than forms with *-n’t*, though they must be about equally old. *It’s* as a written form is from the seventeenth century and ultimately drove out *’tis*, in which the pronoun rather than the verb is reduced. There is no current contraction of *it was* to replace older *’twas*,

and, in the light of the practical disappearance of the subjunctive, it is not surprising that there is none for *it were*.

It'll has replaced older *'twill*; *will* similarly is contracted after other pronouns and, in speech, after other words as well. In older times *'ll*, usually written *le* (as in *Ile, youle*), occurred only after vowels and was hence not syllabic, as it must be after consonants. *Would* is contracted as early as the late sixteenth century as *'ld*, later becoming *'d*, which came in the eighteenth century to be used for *had* also.

The contraction of *have* written *'ve* likewise seems to have occurred first in the eighteenth century. After a consonant, this contraction is identical in pronunciation with unstressed *of* (compare “the wood of the tree” and “He would’ve done it”), hence such uneducated spellings as *would of* and *should of* frequently are written in literary **eye dialect** to indicate that the speaker is unschooled. (The point seems to be “This is the way the speaker would write *have* if obliged to do so.”) As indicative of pronunciation the spelling is pointless.

EXPANDED VERB FORMS

Progressive verb forms, consisting of a form of *be* plus a present participle (“I am working”), occur occasionally in Old English but are rare before the fifteenth century and remain relatively infrequent until the seventeenth. The progressive passive, as in “He is being punished,” does not occur until the later part of the eighteenth century. Pepys, for instance, writes “to Hales’s the painter, thinking to have found Harris sitting there for his picture, which is drawing for me” (April 26, 1668), where we would use *is being drawn*.

In early Modern English, verbs of motion or becoming frequently use *be* instead of *have* in their perfect forms: “is risen,” “are entered in the Roman territories,” “were safe arrived,” “is turned white.”

Do is frequently used as a verbal auxiliary, though it is used somewhat differently from the way it is used today—for example, “I do wonder, his insolence can brooke to be commanded” (*Coriolanus*) and “The Serpent that did sting thy Fathers life / Now weares his Crowne” (*Hamlet*), where current English would not use it at all. Compare with these instances “A Nun of winters sisterhood kisses not more religiouslie” (*As You Like It*), where we would say *does not kiss*, and “What say the citizens?” (*Richard III*), where we would use *do the citizens say*. In present-day English, when there is no other auxiliary, *do* is obligatory in negative statements, in questions, and in emphatic contradictions (“Despite the weather report, it did rain”). In early Modern English, however, *do* was optional in any sentence that had no other auxiliary. Thus one finds all constructions both with and without it: *He fell* or *He did fall*, *Forbid them not* or *Do not forbid them*, *Comes he?* or *Does he come?*

In Old and Middle English times *shall* and *will* were sometimes used to express simple futurity, though as a rule they implied, respectively, obligation and volition. The present-day distinction prescribed for these words was first codified by John Wallis, an eminent professor of geometry at Oxford who wrote a grammar of the English language in Latin (*Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae*, 1653). His rule was that, to express a future event without emotional overtones, one should say *I* or

we shall, but *you, he, she*, or *they will*; conversely, for emphasis, willfulness, or insistence, one should say *I or we will*, but *you, he, she*, or *they shall*. This rule has never been ubiquitous in the English-speaking world. Despite a crusade of more than three centuries to promote the rule, the distinction it prescribes is still largely a mystery to most Americans, who get along very well in expressing futurity and willfulness without it.

OTHER VERBAL CONSTRUCTIONS

Impersonal and reflexive constructions were fairly frequent in early Modern English and were even more so in Middle English. Shakespeare used, for instance, the impersonal constructions “it dislikes [displeases] me,” “methinks,” “it yearns [grieves] me” and the reflexives “I complain me,” “how dost thou feel thyself now?” “I doubt me,” “I repent me,” and “give me leave to retire myself.”

Some now intransitive verbs were used transitively, as in “despair [of] thy charm,” “give me leave to speak [of] him,” and “Smile you [at] my speeches.”

PREPOSITIONS

With the Middle English loss of all distinctive inflectional endings for the noun except genitive and plural *-s*, prepositions acquired a somewhat greater importance than they had had in Old English. Their number consequently increased during the late Middle and early Modern periods. Changes in the uses of certain prepositions are illustrated by the practice of Shakespeare: “And what delight shall she have to looke on [at] the divell?” (*Othello*); “He came of [on] an errand to mee” (*Merry Wives*); “But thou wilt be aveng’d on [for] my misdeeds” (*Richard III*); “’Twas from [against] the Cannon [canon]” (*Coriolanus*); “We are such stuffe / As dreames are made on [of]” (*Tempest*); “Then speake the truth by [of] her” (*Two Gentlemen*); “... that our armies joyn not in [on] a hot day” (*2 Henry IV*).

Even in Old English times, *on* was sometimes reduced in compound words like *abūtan* (now *about*), a variant of *on būtan* ‘on the outside of.’ The reduced form appears in early Modern English *aboard*, *afield*, *abed*, and *asleep*, and with verbal nouns in *-ing* (*a-hunting*, *a-bleeding*, *a-praying*). The *a* of “twice a day” and other such expressions has the same origin. *In* was sometimes contracted to *i*, as in Shakespeare’s “i’ the head,” “i’ God’s name,” and so forth. This particular contraction was much later fondly affected by Robert Browning, who doubtless thought it singularly archaic—for example, “would not sink i’ the scale” and “This rage was right i’ the main” (“Rabbi Ben Ezra”).

EARLY MODERN ENGLISH FURTHER ILLUSTRATED

The following passages are from the King James Bible, published in 1611. They are the opening verses from chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis and the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). The punctuation and spelling of the original have been retained, but a present-day type face has been used.

I. GENESIS 1.1–5.

1. In the beginning God created the Heaven, and the Earth. 2. And the earth was without forme, and voyd, and darkenesse was vpon the face of the deepe: and the Spirit of God mooued vpon the face of the waters. 3. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. 4. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God diuided the light from the darkenesse. 5. And God called the light, Day, and the darknesse he called Night: and the euening and the morning were the first day.

II. GENESIS 2.1–3.

1. Thus the heauens and the earth were finished, and all the hoste of them. 2. And on the seuenth day God ended his worke, which hee had made: And he rested on the seuenth day from all his worke, which he had made. 3. And God blessed the seuenth day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his worke, which God created and made.

III. LUKE 15.11–17, 20–24.

11. A certaine man had two sonnes: 12. And the yonger of them said to his father, Father, giue me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he diuided vnto them his liuing. 13. And not many dayes after, the yonger sonne gathered al together, and tooke his iourney into a farre countrey, and there wasted his substance with riotous liuing. 14. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land, and he beganne to be in want. 15. And he went and ioyned himselfe to a citizen of that countrey, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16. And he would faine haue filled his belly with the huskes that the swine did eate: and no man gaue vnto him. 17. And when he came to himselfe, he said, How many hired seruants of my fathers haue bread inough and to spare and I perish with hunger.... 20. And he arose and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ranne, and fell on his necke, and kissed him. 21. And the sonne said vnto him, Father, I have sinned against heauen, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy sonne. 22. But the father saide to his seruants, Bring foorth the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shooes on his feete. 23. And bring hither the fatted calfe, and kill it, and let us eate and be merrie. 24. For this my sonne was dead, and is aliue againe; hee was lost, and is found.

FOR FURTHER READING

See the list in Chapter 7.



Early Modern English

O, good my lord, no Latin!
I am not such a truant since my coming
As not to know the language I have liv'd in.
A strange tongue makes my cause more strange, suspicious;
Pray, speak in English.

—WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Outer History

The Early Modern English (EMnE) period is the first during which English speakers stand back and take a serious look at their language. Often they don't like what they see and attempt to do something about what they perceive as the sorry state of their native tongue. Although it is a golden age of English literature, it is one in which most of the greatest writers are highly self-conscious about their language.

CULTURAL, POLITICAL, AND TECHNOLOGICAL INFLUENCES

Of the many events of this highly eventful period, some of those with the greatest direct effects on the language are (1) the introduction and dissemination of printing, (2) the Renaissance, (3) the Protestant Reformation, (4) the rise of nationalism, (5) the economic changes, (6) exploration and colonization, (7) the Industrial Revolution, and (8) the American Revolution.

The Introduction of Printing (Late 15th Century)

If we held strictly to our dates of 1500–1800 for EMnE, the introduction of printing to England would belong to the ME period because William Caxton imported and set up England's first printing press in 1476. However, the major impact of printing on the language was felt in the following centuries; indeed, printing contributes largely toward distinguishing Early Modern English from late Middle English.

The effects of printing were manifold. First, it was heavily responsible for freezing English spelling. Unfortunately, this was at a stage just before a major sound change was completed; hence in the twentieth century we are still spelling a language that has not been spoken since the fifteenth century. Second, because printing made books available at a relatively low price, it led to an increased demand for books and literacy, especially among the middle and lower classes. But these classes did not have the opportunity or the leisure to obtain a classical education, so they wanted books in English rather than Latin or French. So that the Greek and Latin classics could be made available to those who knew only English, they were translated into English—and these translations led to the introduction of thousands of loanwords from Latin and Greek into English. Still another consequence of printing was that, for the first time, aspiring authors had at least the opportunity (though rarely the actuality) of making a living by writing without the financial support of a rich patron. It is not an exaggeration to say that contemporary Western civilization is the child of the printing press. Finally, because the earliest printing presses were set up in the London area, the written English of the texts produced was in the London dialect, a fact important in making this dialect the standard for written English throughout England. Copies of printed books were distributed all over the country, familiarizing speakers of other regional dialects with the London dialect. At the same time, printing contributed to the decline in prestige of regional dialects because they were no longer being written down; there is no EMnE parallel to such ME masterpieces as the West Midlands *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Pearl*.

The English Renaissance (Late 15th to 16th Centuries)

Another important influence on EMnE was the Renaissance. The revival of interest in classical learning resulted in translations of such authors as Caesar, Plutarch, Plato, Virgil, Ovid, and Homer, authors accessible only in Latin (or Greek) prior to the sixteenth century. Even the works of those so important in the religious controversies of the time—figures like Erasmus, Calvin, and Martin Luther—were originally written in Latin and translated later. All these translations brought classical loanwords into English. They also gave English authors practice in developing a sophisticated English style that incorporated the features of classical rhetoric compatible with English. The very fact that the works of the great classical authors existed in English translation added to the status of the English language. At the same time, familiarity with classical models forced English writers to compare English to Latin. Not surprisingly, English almost always suffered from the comparison, at least in the eyes of those making it. This in turn prompted attempts to improve the English language.

The Protestant Reformation (16th Century)

One consequence of Henry VIII's disputes with the Pope was the Reformation and the separation of Protestants from the Roman Catholic Church. The Protestant belief that people should read the Bible for themselves led to numerous translations of the Bible, culminating in the Authorized Version (the King James Bible) of 1611, whose language has had a powerful effect on English stylistics ever since its appearance. In particular, its plain style (when compared with the ornate language and obscure vocabulary of many Renaissance texts) has been praised and recommended for emulation ever since its publication in 1611.

The Reformation also tended to break the centuries-old monopoly of the Church on education. Because Latin had always been the official language of the Church and because most educators had been clergymen, Latin quite understandably had been viewed as the primary language of education. However, the new schools set up by merchants and gentry after the Reformation were staffed by laymen, not clergy (or, if by clergy, by Protestant clergy), a fact that was to lead to increased emphasis on English at the expense of Latin and ultimately to the almost complete transfer of the responsibility for education from the Church to the state. In the religious disputes following the Reformation, both Protestants and Catholics looked to the medieval church for historical evidence to support their arguments. This in turn led to an interest in medieval English, to the rediscovery of Old English, and, in general, to an awareness of the ancestry of English among Renaissance antiquarians.

Rising Nationalism (Late 16th Century)

The emergence of national states in the modern sense had begun all over Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and nationalism in England received an especially strong impetus when Elizabeth I was excommunicated by papal bull in 1570. Elizabeth's long and popular reign (1558–1603) as a powerful national—and nationalistic—monarch fostered pride in the English language. Though Latin had for centuries been the international language of all of Europe, its association with the Roman Catholic Church and England's continental adversaries tended to undermine its previously unquestioned status as *the* language of learning. This new pride in English as the language of the English nation is succinctly illustrated in such lines from Shakespeare as *The language I have learn'd these forty years, I My native English, now I must forego* (*Richard II* 1.3.159–60) or *here will be an old abusing of God's patience and the King's English* (*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 1.4.5). The conscious desire to produce a national literature in English to parallel the grand epics of Homer and Virgil in Greek and Latin is exemplified by works like Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590), a celebration not only of Elizabeth I but of the English language past and present.

Changes in the Economic System (16th to 17th Centuries)

Beginning in the late fifteenth century and continuing into the early seventeenth century, English landowners combined small holdings for more efficient

management and converted estates into sheep pastures to increase the wool production so important to England's economy. In the process, thousands of former tenants were evicted (equivalent to being “downsized” today). The affected peasants frequently revolted, but the process continued, and the dispossessed people gradually drifted to the cities, leading to greater urbanization of the nation as a whole. Cities became melting pots of dialects from rural areas all over England, and thus the dialectal picture of England was altered.

Urbanization also fostered the rise of a middle class whose members wanted to improve their social and economic standing. Insecure in their status yet eager to move upward still further, the middle classes are typically concerned with correct behavior, including linguistic behavior. In response to these concerns, handbooks of correct usage were written to teach the middle classes how to sound like those they considered their betters. These books were authoritarian in approach, which was precisely what the market demanded: the insecure do not want theory, speculation, abstraction, or exceptions; they want hard and fast practical rules that are easy to understand and memorize.

Exploration and Colonization (17th to 19th Centuries)

Compared with the Dutch, Spanish, and Portuguese, the English were dilatory in entering the age of global exploration and colonization. At the beginning of the EMnE period, England had only one overseas possession, the town of Calais, and she lost that in 1558. However, thirty years later, England defeated the Spanish Armada and suddenly found herself a major sea power in Europe. Within the next hundred years, the English were to acquire such far-flung colonies as Bermuda, Jamaica, the Bahamas, British Honduras, the Leeward Islands, Barbados, the Mosquito Coast, Canada, the American colonies, India, St. Helena, Gambia, and the Gold Coast. By 1800 they had Gibraltar, the Windward Islands, Sierra Leone, Pitcairn Island, Penang, Beukulen (in the Dutch East Indies), Australia, New Zealand, and Pakistan—not to mention a number of colonies which they held for only a few years. Figure 7.1 shows the extent of the British Empire in 1897. The exotic products and processes of these colonies were directly responsible for the introduction of thousands of new loanwords into English from—for the first time—non-Indo-European languages. Conversely, colonization and commerce led to the spread of English around the globe and ultimately to the present position of English as the most widely used language in the world after Mandarin Chinese (including second language and foreign language speakers). English, however, is the language of 80 percent of the information stored on computers throughout the world.

The Industrial Revolution (Late 18th Century)

Toward the end of the Early Modern English period, the Scots engineer and inventor James Watt made improvements on designs that allowed the modern steam engine to become practical. Though many other factors and conditions were involved, Watt's achievement is usually cited as the beginning of the



FIGURE 7.1 Map of the British Empire 1897 (Gray).

© Cengage Learning

Industrial Revolution. The Industrial Revolution led to even more intensive urbanization because workers had to be clustered in one area to work the factory machines. The Industrial Revolution also eventually led to the massive technical vocabulary that is so characteristic of Present-Day English. Such words include *jenny*, used in the names of machines (such as *spinning-Jenny*), and *Luddites*, used today to describe someone who is not good with machinery such as computers. (The word comes from Captain Ludd, who led an organized band of English workers who set out to destroy machinery.) Initially, however, industrialization of England may have temporarily decreased the percentage of literacy in the nation because so many children were put into the factories instead of being sent to school. There were no laws in the Early Modern period that required children to go to school or that limited their hours and labor conditions.

The American Revolution (Late 18th Century)

At the end of the EMnE period, the American colonies revolted and became an independent nation. At the time, this did not represent a great geographical loss to England; after all, she still held Canada, and the thirteen colonies, strung out in a thin strip along the eastern shores of a large continent, comprised only a few hundred thousand square miles out of an empire of many millions of square miles. These American colonies contained no gold or silver, the furs were already depleted, and the land was not even especially fertile. However, U.S. independence did represent the first political separation of English speakers from their parent country and the beginning of what would become multiple national Englishes.

ENGLISH COMES OF AGE

W 7.26

English is the official language (with another language) in 53 of the world's countries and is the sole official language in 32 of those countries. This, however, is not necessarily the English we speak in America, as many of these countries (such as Nigeria) use a pidgin (a simplified language that develops as a means of communication between two groups who do not have a common language) or creole (a stable, full-fledged language that developed from a pidgin).

The victory of English as the spoken language of the English people had been decided by the thirteenth century. English was accepted as a respectable language for “creative” literature by the end of the fourteenth century. Nonetheless, its suitability as a scholarly language was still in doubt in the seventeenth century. Over two hundred years after Chaucer, well after Shakespeare's death, in the same century that Milton wrote *Paradise Lost*, Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* (1620) and Sir Isaac Newton's *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1687) appeared in Latin. Nor were Bacon and Newton fusty old fogies out of touch with their times. Quite the contrary: the basic principles in their works remain the underpinnings of science in the twentieth century. Bacon and Newton wrote in Latin because Latin was still the international language of scholarship. Latin was not even totally extinct as a literary language in England; Milton himself wrote Latin as well as English poetry for most of his creative life.

At the beginning of the Early Modern English period, English had even less of a monopoly on literary and scholarly works. French was still the most prestigious of the European vernaculars, and Latin was almost universally employed for “serious” works. Those who advocated the continued use of Latin had some good arguments. True, a certain amount of vested interest was often involved. They themselves had spent years mastering Latin, and it was disconcerting to think that all those years had been wasted. They were right in asserting that English was not understood beyond the shores of England (though this would change with increased colonization and commerce throughout the EMnE period), that English was changing constantly and their English writings would not be easily accessible to future generations, and that English lacked the vocabulary necessary for the learning ushered in by the Renaissance. But history was against them. The burgeoning middle class—the class from whom the majority of scholars were to come in the future—had neither the leisure for nor the interest in devoting years of their education to the study of Latin. Vocabulary deficiencies could and would be remedied by borrowing from Latin and by coining new English words or extending the meanings of existing ones. English would continue to change, but the rate of change in the written language was to decrease; works written in the seventeenth century are more comprehensible to a twentieth-century reader than works written in the fourteenth century were to a seventeenth-century reader.

The problem that English was not understood in the rest of Europe remained, ameliorated to some extent by the fact that when English did increase its vocabulary to accommodate the new learning, it did so by borrowing Latin roots that were familiar to speakers of other European languages. Moreover, the

English did not find themselves intellectual outcasts when they gave up Latin because Latin was being replaced by the vernacular all over Europe. For example, the Dutch inventor of the microscope, Leeuwenhoek, wrote only in Dutch, and the secretary of the (British) Royal Society reported in 1665 that even the Italians “love every whit as well to read books in Italian as the English doe to read them in English.” Ultimately, though not until the twentieth century, English would replace Latin as the international language of scholarship. Many would lament (and continue to lament today) the loss of knowledge of classical languages, but, by the eighteenth century, English had no rival as the language of scholars in England.

The Debate Over Vocabulary

The universal acceptance of English as a scholarly language did not mean that English was complacently regarded as a perfect vehicle or taken for granted without second thoughts. Indeed, one might call the entire Early Modern English period the Age of Linguistic Anxiety. Once the inevitability of its universal use had been at least tacitly recognized, disputes immediately arose about its deficiencies and its purity. The earliest perceived glaring inadequacy was in lexicon. Both the translators of the Latin and Greek classics and the practitioners of the new learning spawned by the Renaissance discovered that the existing word stock of English was insufficient to express economically and elegantly the ideas they wanted to convey.

Borrowing was the easiest and most obvious way to fill the gaps in English vocabulary, and Latin was the easiest and most obvious language from which to borrow. English had borrowed before, of course, but the loanwords in EMnE differed from those of earlier periods in several ways. First, the great majority of loans were from Latin and not from some other vernacular. The second difference lay in the sheer number of loanwords. Impressive as the French loans of Middle English had been, they were greatly outnumbered by the Latin loans of the Renaissance. Third, for the first time in the history of English, the borrowing was conscious and was done by specific individuals, many of whom were deliberately attempting to improve the language. Fourth, the bulk of the loanwords were, at least initially, learned in nature, though thousands of them were eventually to become part of the general vocabulary of the language.

Many of the conscious borrowers were responsible scholars, borrowing only when they felt a real need and carefully defining the Latinisms they used. Best known of such conscientious borrowers is Sir Thomas Elyot, who took great pains to define his neologisms, in some instances with only a word or two, in other instances with a lengthy explanation of several sentences. For example, in his *The Boke Named the Governour* (1531), we find the following.

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| <i>consultation</i> | This thinge that is called Consultation is the generall denomination of the acte wherin men do deuise to gether & reason what is to be done. |
| <i>fury</i> | a fury or infernall monstre |

majesty whiche is the holle proporcion and figure of noble astate
and is proprelie a beautie or comelynesse in his counte-
nance / langage / & gesture apt to his dignite / and
accommodate to time / place / & company: whiche like as
the sonne doth his beames / so doth it caste on the
beholders and berers a pleasaunt & terrible reuerence.

Most borrowers, however, were less responsible than Elyot, and even Elyot often introduced loans without explaining them. Many writers used unfamiliar Latin terms simply to show off their learning and probably were more pleased than otherwise that the average reader found their work virtually incomprehensible. The dictionary compiler Henry Cockeram even provided lists of “learned” equivalents for everyday words, including such grotesqueries as *pistated* for “baked” and *homogalact* for “foster brother.”

Predictably, there were many who objected strenuously to the flood of new words pouring into English. Perhaps the majority of these protesters accepted borrowing in principle, realizing that English was insufficient in some ways, but they objected to the foolish excesses, to the use of strange and obscure Latin words when adequate English equivalents already existed. They called such excessive neologisms **inkhorn terms** (so-called for the horn that held the ink, thus suggesting how such terms were used by people who were highly literate). They mocked their pretentious users in such diatribes as the following statement by Thomas Wilson.

Some seeke so far for outlandish English, that they forget altogether their mothers tongue. And I dare sweare this, if some of their mothers were aliue, thei were not able to tell what they say:... The vnlearned or foolish phantasticall, that smelles but of learning (such fellowes as haue seen learned men in their daies) wil so Latin their tongues, that the simple can not but wonder at their talke, and thinke surely they speake by some reuelation. I know them that thinke *Rhetorique* to stande wholie vpon darke wordes, and hee that can catche an ynke horne terme by the taile, him they coumpt to be a fine Englishman, and a good *Rhetorician*.

Wilson, and other writers like Roger Ascham and Sir John Cheke, recognized the need for some borrowing and objected primarily to its overuse and misuse. Still others were concerned about the purity of the English vocabulary and resented borrowing because it contaminated this purity. Most members of this faction did perceive inadequacies in English. But rather than filling all these gaps with Latinate loans, they encouraged reviving older English words that had been lost, coining new words from the basic English stock, and adapting dialectal forms into the standard language.

The poet Edmund Spenser, who greatly admired Chaucer, was one of the most enthusiastic of the archaizers; he used such archaic or dialectal words as *gar* ‘make’ (a causative verb), *make* ‘write verse’, *forswatt* ‘sweaty from work’, and *spill* ‘perish’ in his works. Though Spenser employed many such terms correctly, few

of them were accepted into the general, standard language. Ironically, Spenser's best-known contributions to the English lexicon are probably *braggadocio* and *derring-do*: the first, despite its Middle English base of *brag*, looks like an Italian loan, and the second is only a pseudo-archaism resulting from Spenser's misunderstanding of a Chaucerian term meaning "daring to do." For the most part, attempts to substitute archaic English words for Latin neologisms were unsuccessful.

Among those who tried to augment the language by coining new words from existing English forms was Sir John Cheke, who went so far as to try to translate the New Testament using only English terms. His primary approach was to extend the denotations of existing words or to use functional shift to make one part of speech from another. For example, Cheke substituted *moond* for the Latin *lunatic*, *crossed* for *crucified*, and *biword* for *parable*. Again, his attempts were fruitless; *byword* does survive today, but only in the meaning "proverb," a meaning which the word has had since Old English times. Similarly, *cross* (which was in fact originally a Latin loan via Old Irish into Old English) is still a verb in PDE but not with the meaning "crucify."

Another advocate of using English resources was Arthur Golding, who was especially fond of compounding. Many of his compounds are almost self-explanatory and often rather appealing, such as *fleshstrings* (muscles), *grosswitted*, and *heart-biting*, but few of them survived. One that did was *base-minded*—but it was probably already in the language because Queen Elizabeth I used it in a letter the year before Golding's book was published (1587). Another one, *primetime*, looks startlingly modern; Golding, however, used it to mean "an early age of the world," an extension of a contemporary meaning of "springtime." What is more, the word *prime* was an earlier loan from French.

A number of EMnE writers attempted to "English" the technical vocabularies of various subjects. For instance, in mathematics, Robert Recorde used *threlike* for "equilateral (triangle)" and *likejamme* for "parallelogram." In logic, Ralph Lever invented *endsay* for "conclusion" and *saywhat* for "definition." In rhetoric, George Puttenham used *over-reacher* to mean "hyperbole" and *dry mock* to mean "irony." None of these invented terms were adopted, at least partly because the people who were likely to need them were already familiar with the Latin terms.

Despite the protests and despite the efforts to substitute native formations for the inkhorn terms, the Latin loanwords continued to pour into English. Many of them were accepted without comment or objection because the consensus was that the language needed new words, even if there was disagreement about the appropriate source. Familiarity bred acceptance for many others; in fact, it was their very strangeness that had made them deplorable in the first place. Today we find it amusing that people could object to such words as *discretion*, *exaggerate*, *expect*, *industrial*, and *scheme*—all of which were inkhorn terms when they appeared in print for the first time in English between 1530 and 1600. We take these words for granted today because they are so familiar. Our reaction to *contund*, *effodicate*, *exinanite*, *synchysis*, and *transumptive* is quite different because they look so strange, and we do not know what they mean. Yet these were also inkhorn terms that entered English during the same period. The only difference

between the two sets of words is that the first survived and the second did not. Hundreds of the newly borrowed words from Latin and Greek during the EMnE period were destined to be lost again, some almost immediately and others within a century or so. Still, enough remained in the language to alter permanently the entire texture of the lexicon.

Although Latin (and, to a much lesser extent, Greek) was the major source of both neologisms and the debate over them during EMnE, loanwords from other European languages also produced some controversy. French loans continued to come in, as they had ever since the twelfth century. However, by now, English already had thousands of French loans, English spelling had been modified under French influence, and there were standardized ways of adapting French words to English. Thus, new French loans attracted relatively little attention. But when English travelers on the Continent brought back Italian and Spanish words, the travelers were ridiculed for their pretentious “oversea” language. One of the reasons for the attention was that the un-English endings in *-o* and *-a* prevented these words from slipping unnoticed into the general vocabulary. Indeed, some of the Spanish and Italian loans from this period still look exotic today. To most English speakers, such EMnE loans from Italian as *cameo*, *cupola*, *piazza*, and *portico* and such words from Spanish as *armada*, *bravado*, *desperado*, and *peccadillo* seem much more “foreign” than such French loans from the same period as *comrade*, *duel*, *ticket*, and *volunteer*.

The Spelling Reformers

Beginning a little later than the inkhorn controversy and continuing throughout the sixteenth century was a flurry of activity over another aspect of English words: their spelling. Even Old English spelling had been less than perfect. Then the influence of French created additional confusion in the system during Middle English. By the sixteenth century, the effects of the Great Vowel Shift (see Chapter 2, “Phonology,” the section on Vowels) were making the English correspondence between vowel and vowel symbol very different from that of such Continental languages as French and Italian. Why a great interest in spelling reform should have occurred at this particular time is not certain. Probably it was partly a by-product of the Renaissance; people noticed the seeming consistency and standardization of Latin spelling and became unhappy with the chaotic conditions in English. An ongoing concern over the pronunciation of Greek perhaps also led to increased awareness of the inadequacies of English spelling. The contemporary French attempts to reform French orthography may have introduced a “keep up with the Joneses” element to the situation. One might even view the movement as an early harbinger of the conservatism and tidying-up impulses of the eighteenth century.

Whatever the reasons, the mid-sixteenth century saw many suggestions for reforming English spelling. Ideally and at its most extreme, reform would result in a simplified, consistent, “phonetic,” standardized spelling system for English. In its weakest version, reform would clean up a few of the most glaring deficiencies and provide fixed spellings for all English words, without attempting to

remove internal inconsistencies or to change the existing inventory of alphabetic symbols.

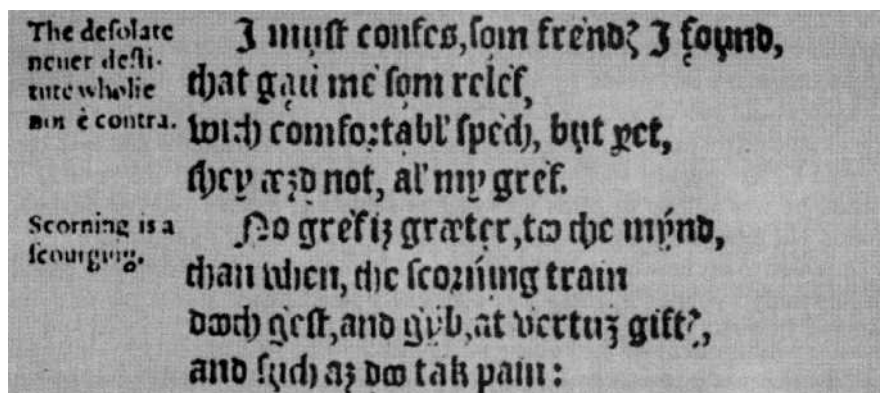
Some of the leading figures in the movement for spelling reform were men who also participated in the inkhorn dispute. Among these was Sir John Cheke, whose suggestions for reform were relatively mild compared with those of some of his successors. Cheke (1569) proposed removing all silent letters; where these unsounded letters had indicated vowel length, Cheke would instead have doubled the vowel.

Much more sweeping were the reforms proposed by Sir Thomas Smith (1568), who understandably but wrong-mindedly wanted letter forms to be “pictures” of speech sounds, that is, to have an iconic relationship to the sounds. Smith would also have thrown out redundant letters like *c* and *q*, reintroduced the OE thorn ⟨þ⟩ for /θ/, and used Greek theta ⟨θ⟩ for /ð/. He wanted to modify the forms of some other letters and to indicate vowel length by various diacritical marks such as the circumflex, the macron, and the umlaut. Smith’s suggestions were simply too drastic to be accepted—and the fact that he wrote his treatise on English spelling in Latin did not improve his chances for success.

John Hart’s proposals for spelling reform were first published in 1569 and 1570, although they had been written nearly two decades earlier. Like Smith, he proposed several new characters and wanted to discard such letters as *y*, *w*, and *c*. He would have indicated vowel length by a dot under the vowel. Recognizing that capital letters had no counterpart in speech (that is, capital and lowercase letters are pronounced identically), he recommended eliminating them entirely—but then would have put a virgule (slant line) in front of words that would otherwise have been capitalized. Hart might have been pleased to know that in e-communications and SMS messaging today that people write more casually, as they speak, and thus omit the capitalization.

William Bullokar (1580) did not suggest eliminating letters from the English alphabet but did propose using various diacritical marks to distinguish, for example, /j/ and /g/. He also wanted new symbols for /š/, /θ/, /ð/, and /hw/. Bullokar’s understanding of phonology was extremely fuzzy, but he was more farsighted than some of the other reformers in that he wanted a dictionary to record and preserve the new spellings and also a grammar to stabilize and set standards for English. Figure 7.2 illustrates Bullokar’s reformed spelling.

The latter half of the sixteenth century saw still more spelling reformers, but their suggestions were essentially along the same lines as those already mentioned. Richard Mulcaster, however, took a somewhat different approach. He was more conservative than his fellow reformers in that he was willing to leave the existing alphabet as it was, neither adding nor eliminating characters. Yet, he was ahead of his time in recognizing the inevitability of sound changes, in preferring to rely chiefly on current usage, and in realizing that the relationship between speech sound and written symbol is arbitrary. Rather than attempting a perfect match between sound and symbol, he would have been content with eliminating letters that were completely redundant (double consonants in many words, for instance), with adding letters where existing spelling had too few, and with altering spelling when the same spelling represented two different



Transcription

I must confes, some frends I found,
that gav me som relief
with comfortabl speech, but yet,
they æzd not, al my gref.
No gref is græter, too the mynd
than when, the scorning train
doth gest, and gib, at vertuz gifts,
and such az doo tak pain.

Translated into modern spelling

I must confess, some friends I found,
that gave me some relief,
with comfortable speech, but yet
they eased not, all my grief.
No grief is greater, to the mind,
than when, the scorning train
doth jest, and gibe, at virtue's gifts,
and such as do take pain.

Note the use of diacritical marks (marks that indicate vowel length, such as in "gave," line 2) and the long s for the initial letter (such as in "som," line 1). From William Bullokar, *Booke at Large* (1580) and *Bref Grammar for English* (1586) (Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1977), n.p.

FIGURE 7.2 Excerpt from William Bullokar's Reformed Spelling.

From William Bullokar, *Booke at Large* (1580) and *Bref Grammar for English* (1586) (Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1977), n.p.

pronunciations (for example, *use* as noun and *use* as verb). Mulcaster would even have accepted highly irregular spellings if they were already widely used and familiar. In essence, he was willing to patch up where possible and did not propose sweeping reforms. His more modest goal was a fixed, uniform spelling for each word.

It is hard to say how much influence the spelling reformers of the sixteenth century had. Certainly "public" spelling was completely standardized within the next two centuries. By 1750, Lord Chesterfield could write to his son:

Orthography is so absolutely necessary for a man of letters, or a gentleman, that one false spelling may fix a ridicule upon him for the rest of his life; and I know a man of quality who never recovered the ridicule of having spelled *wholesome* without the *w*.

We might compare this to our lives today, where job applications and résumés that have spelling errors get discarded very quickly.

However, the scribes of the Chancery (the royal secretariat) and the printers probably had more to do with this stabilization than the reformers did. Chesterfield's warning notwithstanding, "personal" spelling—that of individuals in their private writing—remained unfixed long after the spelling of printed material had become standardized. None of the reformers' suggested new characters were adopted. English today does not use diacritics (marks added to letters that affect their sounds) except in words still regarded as foreign (such as naïve, façade, and fête—and even these are often spelled without diacritics, especially in SMS and emails). This is a pity, perhaps, because judicious use of diacritics could go a long way toward solving the problem of too few vowel symbols in English. Other European languages like French, Spanish, Danish, and Swedish do not find diacritics too cumbersome, but, for whatever reason, English has never adopted them.

The sixteenth century was perhaps the last time a thoroughgoing reform of English spelling was possible. Soon thereafter, the spread of printed books was to make the vested interest in older customs too great to be overthrown, except perhaps by government fiat, a path that England and other English-speaking nations have chosen not to take. The present system, unsatisfactory as it is in so many ways, does have certain advantages. Although English pronunciation both within and across national boundaries differs so greatly as to make some versions almost mutually unintelligible, all native speakers of English write the same language. Our fossilized spelling system unites the English-speaking world.

Furthermore, with the exception of a few, mostly very common, words, English spelling is more systematic and predictable than most people believe. The fact that most of us spell most words correctly is evidence of this. Moreover, again with a few outstanding exceptions, the conversion of spelling to sound is highly predictable. Most of us know how to pronounce most of the new words we encounter in reading. For example, when Celia Millward asked a group of thirty native speakers to say the nonwords *lape*, *morantishly*, *permaction*, and *phorin*, there was virtual unanimity in their pronunciation, including even the placement of the major stress. Complex though it is, there is a systematic relationship between English spelling and English pronunciation. George Bernard Shaw was simply being silly (as he probably knew) if he actually said that English *fish* could be spelled *ghoti* (*gh* as in *rough*; *o* as in *women*; *ti* as in *lotion*): *gh* is never pronounced /f/ at the beginning of a word, *ti* never spells /ʃ/ at the end of a word, and *o* spells /ɪ/ only in *women*. If there were a literate English speaker who had never seen the word /fiʃ/, he or she would still spell it *fish*. And most literate speakers would pronounce *ghoti* as /goti/, even though *gh* is rare at the beginning of English words and *i* is relatively rare at the end of words.

The Dictionary Makers

It may seem surprising that the earliest English-to-English dictionary dates only from the first part of the seventeenth century. "But how did people get along without dictionaries?" is our likely response. There were no English-to-English dictionaries because there was no real need for them. After all, what do we use a

dictionary for? Most people today consult a dictionary primarily to check the spelling of words they want to write. When most people never wrote at all because they did not know how, and when spelling was not fixed anyway, a spelling “error” was not a social embarrassment, so there was no need to check spelling. Further, until the widespread dissemination of printing, people used their memories more than they do today and were less prone to forget what they had previously seen or read. Prior to the introduction of inkhorn terms and the explosion of knowledge brought in by the Renaissance, most literate speakers of English would have known the meaning of most English words that they were likely to encounter. Even today, dictionaries are not consulted especially frequently to determine correct pronunciation, and pronunciation was even less of a problem before the introduction of large numbers of Latin and Greek words into the lexicon. In sum, there were no English-to-English dictionaries prior to the seventeenth century because there was no particular need for them.

All of this changed with the expansion of literacy and the Renaissance. Another incentive to the production of English-to-English dictionaries at this time was the increasing desire, already noted with respect to the inkhorn controversy and spelling reform, to refine, standardize, and fix the language, a desire that was only to intensify throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The first English-to-English dictionaries did, however, have antecedents. As far back as Anglo-Saxon times, manuscripts written in Latin often had interlinear translations in Old English. Indeed, a modern reader may be shocked to see a magnificent manuscript page defaced by hastily scribbled Old English words inserted above the elegantly executed Latin text—in exactly the same way that contemporary students of a foreign language write English equivalents over the unfamiliar words in their reading. Figure 7.3 shows Old English glosses in the famous Book of Lindisfarne. For example, in the upper left corner, over the Latin words *incipit euangelium* are the Old English words *onginneð godspell* ‘begins gospel’.

Besides these interlinear translations or **glosses**, there were separate word lists, or **glossaries**, for the “hard” words of particular texts. Several of these lists survive from the OE period; Ælfric prepared a Latin–Old English list. Such bilingual word lists continued to be prepared throughout the Middle English period; for example, Alexander Neckham compiled the trilingual Latin–French–English *De nominibus utensilium* around 1200. These early bilingual or trilingual lists were usually organized by subject matter and not alphabetized (even though the principle of alphabetization was known). The first alphabetical bilingual dictionaries did not appear until the mid-sixteenth century.

In addition to glossaries of unusual or hard words, bilingual vocabularies, the predecessors of our modern Berlitz phrase books, were prepared for travelers on the Continent. Caxton printed such a 52-page French–English vocabulary in 1480. Nor were all these word lists restricted to the familiar European languages and Hebrew. In America, Roger Williams wrote his *Key into the Languages of America* (1643) partly as a grammar but primarily as a series of word lists arranged by subject matter.



FIGURE 7.3 Old English Glosses in the Book of Lindisfarne.

Facsimile of Incarnation Initial Page of Lindisfarne Gospels (fol. 29). Reproduced by permission of the British Library.

Approaching the principle of the monolingual dictionary from another direction, Richard Mulcaster compiled a list of about 8,000 English words in the first part of his treatise on education, *The Elementarie* (1582). However, he included no definitions.

Finally, in 1604, the schoolmaster Robert Cawdrey (with the help of his son Thomas, also a schoolmaster) published *A Table Alphabeticall*, the first true alphabetically arranged English-to-English dictionary. It contained about 2,500 rare and borrowed words with definitions in English (see Figure 7.4). It is addressed to a new audience created by the Renaissance—literate women who did not know Latin or French. The book reflects the effects of the Reformation in its assumption that such women would be reading the Bible for themselves. Furthermore, it shows the rising concern for correctness in its statement “and also be made able to use the same aptly themselves.” Incidentally, the variant

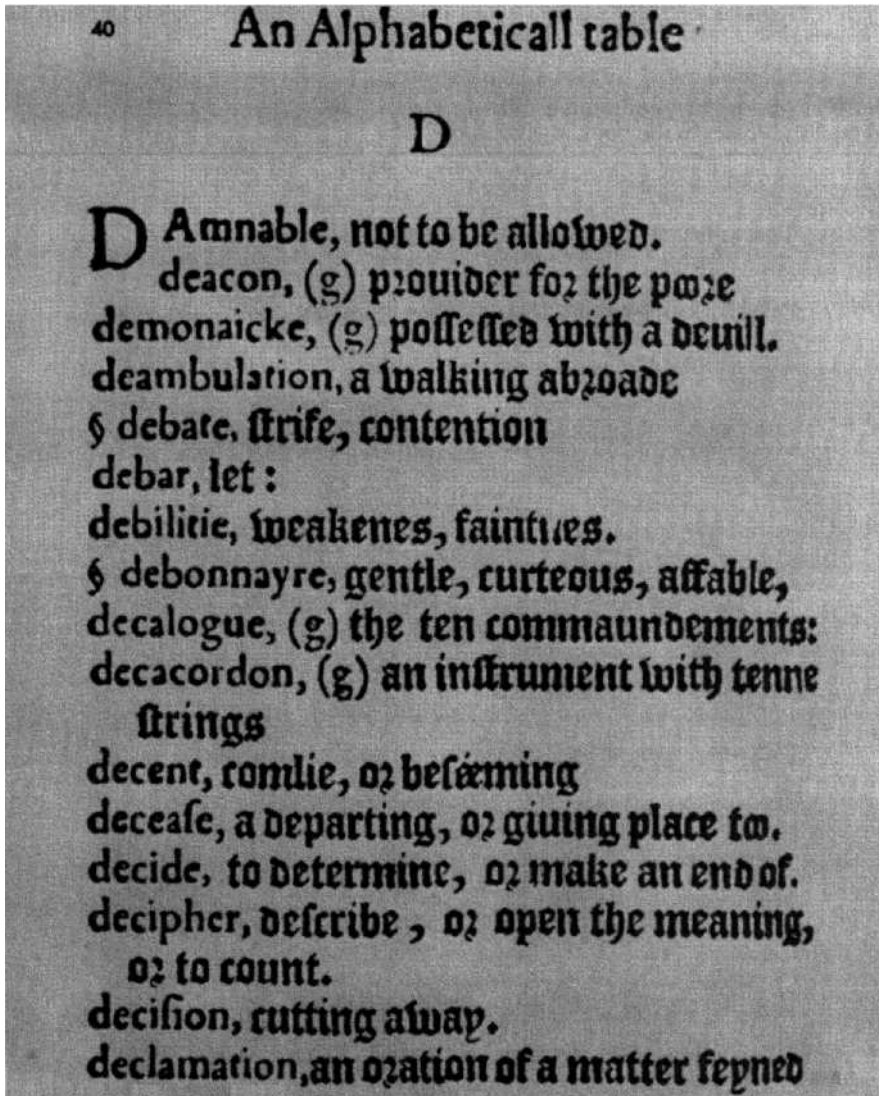


FIGURE 7.4 Excerpt from Cawdrey's *A Table Alphabeticall*.

The complete title of Cawdrey's little dictionary was *A Table Alphabeticall, conteyning and teaching the true writing, and understanding of hard usuall English wordes, borrowed from the Hebrew, Greeke, Latine, or French, &c. With the interpretation thereof by plaine English words, gathered for the benefit & helpe of Ladies, Gentlewomen, or any other unskilfull persons. Whereby they may the more easilie and better understand many hard English wordes, which they shall heare or read in Scriptures, Sermons, or elsewhere, and also be made able to use the same aptly themselues.*

Excerpt from Robert Cawdrey, *A Table Alphabeticall*... (1604) (Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints).

spellings *wordes* and *words* show that spelling was not yet absolutely fixed. Apparently there were a lot of ladies, gentlewomen, and other “unskillful persons” eager to improve themselves, for Cawdrey’s little dictionary went into four editions.

After Cawdrey, the number of English-to-English dictionaries proliferated, each of them more comprehensive and complex than its predecessors. Each compiler borrowed heavily from previously published dictionaries (as dictionary makers still do); Cawdrey himself had taken about half his entries from Thomas Thomas’s 1588 Latin-English dictionary. Other dictionary would follow:

- John Bullokar’s *An English Expositor* (1616) included about 60 percent more entries than Cawdrey’s dictionary. His definitions were in general more extensive than Cawdrey’s, and he marked archaic words. (Cawdrey had identified French and Greek loans but not Latin loans.)
- Henry Cockeram’s popular *English Dictionarie* (1623 and many later editions) contained three parts: an alphabetical list of “refined” words, another list of “vulgar” words, and a short dictionary of mythology.
- Thomas Bount’s *Glossographia* (1656) was based heavily on preceding dictionaries. It was larger (11,000 entries) and was the first English dictionary to cite sources and give etymologies, imperfect as many of them were.
- Edward Philips published *The New World of English Words* (1658), so heavily plagiarized from Blount that Blount wrote an attack on it entitled *A World of Errors*. However, Philips’s 1678 revision, *New World of Words or a General English Dictionary*, added to the usual hard words a large number of ordinary words, thereby doubling the number of entries to over 20,000.
- Elisha Cole’s *English Dictionary* of 1676 was based on Philipp’s *New World of English Words* but was expanded to include dialect and cant words (jargon used by a particular group to mislead people outside the group. We often speak of “thieves cant.”) It had about 25,000 entries but was still essentially a hard-words dictionary.
- John Kersey’s *A New English Dictionary* (1702, with later revisions) was the first English dictionary to include everyday words.
- Nathaniel Bailey can perhaps be called the earliest truly modern lexicographer. He was the author of *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary* (1721 and later supplements) and a coauthor of the 950-page 1730 edition of *Dictionarium Britannicum* with its 48,000 entries. In addition to his regular inclusion of ordinary words, etymologies, and cognate forms, Bailey’s dictionary was the first to indicate the stress placement of words. Bailey’s conscientious and complete scholarship made him the standard reference until the publication of Johnson’s dictionary.
- Samuel Johnson announced his plan for a dictionary in 1747, stating that his purpose was to refine and fix the language. In the course of his seven years of compiling *A Dictionary of the English Language* (two volumes, 1755), he gradually recognized the impossibility of achieving this goal, realizing that no

living language could ever be fixed and that language change was inevitable. Yet, ironically, Johnson probably did more to “fix” at least some aspects of the language than any other person before or since—almost all the spellings we use today are those he recommended. Although Johnson’s 40,000 entries were 8,000 fewer than those of Bailey, his dictionary was two and a half times as large and much more comprehensive and accurate. Johnson’s use of illustrative quotations was a first in English dictionary-making and helped establish his dictionary’s immediate influence and popularity. His use of quotations to establish the meanings of words in context was to be adopted by the editors of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (see “Dictionary-Making” section in Chapter 8.)

- Noah Webster’s *A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language* (1806) was the first American dictionary. It established a system of rules to govern spelling and grammar. Immediately after, he went to work on his magnum opus, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828), for which he learned 26 languages including Old English and Sanskrit in order to research the origins of his country’s own tongue. With its 70,000 entries, some feel that it surpassed Johnson’s work in authority and scope. Webster was also a proponent of American spelling in order to develop a language that was distinctive to his country. The *American Spelling Book*, which taught children how to read, spell, and pronounce words, would go through 385 editions in his lifetime. By 1861, it was selling a million copies per year and throughout the years it sold up to a total of 100 million copies. It also helped create the popular contests known as spelling bees. Slowly, he changed the spelling of words, such that they became “Americanized.” He chose *s* over *c* in words like *defense*, he changed the *re* to *er* in words like *center*. He dropped one of the *l*’s in *traveler*, and at first he kept the *u* in words like *colour* or *favour* from British spelling but dropped it in later editions. Favoring phonetic spelling as he did throughout his many treatises on the language, he also altered *tongue* to *tung*, a change that never caught on. For Noah Webster and his fellow spelling reformer, Benjamin Franklin (see Figure 8.1), language was a matter of national identity.

The great flurry of dictionary-making during the EMnE period had several important effects on the subsequent history of English. The general availability of dictionaries encouraged standardized spelling. The heavy emphasis on learned, Latinate words, especially in the earlier hard-word dictionaries, hastened the adoption of these new words into the general vocabulary. Finally, the high quality of Bailey’s and especially Johnson’s dictionaries established the almost unquestioned authority of “The Dictionary,” an authority to which most people still adhere.

The Movement for an English Academy

To the modern speaker and writer of English, the idea of a national academy that would legislate standards of English, settle disputes about usage and spelling, eradicate unfortunate solecisms that have sneaked into the language, and in

general serve as a watchdog over the English tongue probably seems either ridiculous or outrageous. We tend to smile condescendingly at the futile attempts of the French Academy to halt the flow of Anglicisms and Americanisms into contemporary French. However, during the latter part of the seventeenth and the early part of the eighteenth centuries, there was a strong movement in favor of just such an academy for English. This demand for an official sentinel over the language was of a piece with the earlier inkhorn controversy, the attempts at spelling reform, and the dictionary-making: All reflected a desire to tidy up and regulate after the linguistic exuberance of the Renaissance. In particular, the formation of the Italian Accademia della Crusca (1582) and the Académie Française (1635) served, to some at least, as models of what could be done to make the English language more respectable.

One of the earliest to call for an academy was Robert Hooke, the scientist and philosopher, in his continuation (1660) of Francis Bacon's unfinished *New Atlantis*. As curator of experiments of the Royal Society, Hooke may well have been influential in that group's appointment of a subcommittee consisting of both scientists and men of letters to look into the formation of an academy under royal patronage (1664). This subcommittee apparently did little beyond meeting several times and eventually disbanded. Still, others continued to press for a national academy, including Daniel Defoe in his *Essay Upon Projects* (1697) and Joseph Addison in *Spectator* 135 (1711). In an open letter to the Earl of Oxford (who was the Lord Treasurer of England) in 1712, Jonathan Swift proposed that the Earl establish an academy to purify and regulate the language. Queen Anne supported the idea, and for a brief time it looked as if an English academy would actually be founded. But when Anne died in 1714, her successor, George I of Hannover, was a German who paid relatively little attention to affairs in Great Britain and did not even speak English. Without royal support, the movement languished.

Even during the height of agitation for a national academy, it had had its opponents. Some of the opposition was on other than linguistic grounds—the Whigs saw the movement as a power play by the Tories and opposed it for political reasons. Others felt that its authoritarian nature ran contrary to English notions of liberty. Still others sensed that the models, the French and Italian academies, had not been especially successful after all and suspected or realized that efforts to control and purify a living language would be futile.

After the publication of Samuel Johnson's dictionary in 1755, the movement for an English academy died out completely. To some extent, the authority that Johnson's dictionary achieved immediately after its publication made it a substitute for an academy. In addition, in the course of his work, Johnson himself came to recognize the inevitability of language change and the futility and undesirability of trying to legislate it. This attitude on his part at least temporarily squelched whatever impetus for a national academy may have remained.

Within a few years, the establishment of a national academy to legislate for all of English became permanently unfeasible. The English-speaking citizens of the newly independent United States were both too feisty and too insecure to accept docilely the linguistic authority of a body created and staffed by their

recent enemy. Nor did John Adams's proposal for a home-grown American Academy meet with any widespread enthusiasm. Today, when the number of independent nations using English as their national language has multiplied, the infeasibility has become impossibility.

The Emergence of Grammar

In the earlier part of the Early Modern English period, concern about the English language focused primarily on the most obvious and intuitive unit of language, the word—its origin, its spelling, and its codification in dictionaries. Later in the period, language-watchers extended their attention to grammar and especially to “proper” and “improper” usage. This is not to say that no one had previously noticed that different people and groups used different constructions or that grammatical usage was but one of many means of distinguishing classes. However, such variation had been pretty much taken for granted, and few scholars had stood back, looked at the grammar of the language as a whole, and found it sadly wanting. Nor had there been a great demand for putting rules of grammar into print and making them accessible to all. A number of factors, most of them arising outside the world of letters, converged after the mid-eighteenth century to make this an era of anguishing over usage and of attempting to improve it.

One of these factors was the aspirations of the rising middle class. Aware that linguistic usage was one of the things that marked them as different from those they regarded as their betters, they sought guidance in the form of “how-to” books that would help them acquire appropriate linguistic behavior. Another important factor was the spirit of the times. The eighteenth century is often called the Age of Reason. Although generalities are always dangerous, it is certainly true that this period was one of great faith in logic, reason, and organization. Isaac Newton (1642–1727) had seemingly demonstrated that the universe itself was one of order and harmony ruled by a system of ascertainable and immutable divine laws. More recently, Carolus Linnaeus (1707–1778) had devised a taxonomic classification system for all living creatures, plant and animal. If the contents of the universe could be categorized logically and if its behavior could be reduced to laws, then surely the grammar of a language could be defined and regulated.

Still a third factor that encouraged attempts to codify, clean up, and improve English grammar was the prevailing notion that language was of divine origin and that there existed a “universal” grammar from which contemporary languages had deteriorated. Greek and Latin were (wrongly) assumed to have deviated less from this original purity than had the various European vernaculars, and thus they (especially Latin) were regarded as models upon which an improved English grammar should be based. Without the theocentric bias, some theorists today, such as Noam Chomsky, propose a Universal Grammar (UG), a theory of linguistics that postulates principles of grammar shared by all languages and is used to explain language acquisition in children.

This notion is understandable in the context of the times. Little was known about human languages outside the Indo-European languages of Europe and, to

some extent, the Semitic languages (chiefly Hebrew). Even William Jones's demonstration of the unity of the Indo-European languages was not to appear until the end of the eighteenth century. All of these known languages were inflecting languages, and the older the stages of the languages, the more highly inflecting they were. Hence grammar was equated with inflection. Hence the fewer the inflections of a language, the more it must have fallen away from its original purity. Because English had almost no inflections, it was assumed to have little or no grammar and to be extremely corrupt. Obviously, then, if English was to regain any degree of its original purity, it must be provided with rules, cleansed of its corruption, and then prevented from decaying further. These were precisely the goals that most eighteenth-century grammarians set for themselves: to *ascertain* (or to establish rules), to *refine* (or to purify), and, once these two goals had been accomplished, to *fix* (or to stabilize and prevent future change) by publishing the rules of the language.

Beginning in the late sixteenth century, numerous "grammars" of English began to appear, though few of them were to have widespread influence, partly because many of them were not designed for the general public or for school-children. The earliest known such grammar is that by William Bullokar (the spelling reformer). Heavily dependent on Latin terminology, Bullokar's *Bref Grammar* (1586) is printed in his own proposed reformed spelling—which surely did not add to its popularity. Alexander Gil's *Logonomia Anglica* (1621) is quite detailed, but even more slavishly tied to Latin. Indeed, the book is written in Latin, and English examples are in Gil's phonetic transcription, making it even less accessible to the general public than Bullokar's grammar. John Wallis's *Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae* (1653) was also in Latin.

By this time, however, some writers were beginning to break out of the Latin mold. Jeremiah Wharton, for instance, in his *The English Grammar* (1654) recognized the lack of inflection in English without deploring the fact.

Genders of Nouns in Latine bee seven; but the consideration of them in English is useless; but onely to observ, that som words do signifie Males; som females; and som neither; and that of the first wee must say *hee*; of the second *shee*; of the third *it*.

More clearly pedagogical in intent was Joseph Aickin's *The English Grammar* (1693), whose preface was addressed "To the School-masters of the English Tongue and other Candid Readers" and whose first chapter begins

My Child: your Parents have desired me, to teach you the English-Tongue. For though you can speak English already; yet you are not an English Scholar, till you can read, write, and speak English truly.

It was the eighteenth-century school grammars, however, that were to have the greatest audience and influence, an influence continuing down to the present day. Of these, Robert Lowth's *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762 and many subsequent editions) was the most prominent. Lowth was bishop of London, privy councilor (advisor to the king or queen), professor of poetry at Oxford, and a scholar of Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and several modern languages—clearly

a man with impressive credentials. Lowth had no doubts about what was correct and no hesitations about condemning roundly what was incorrect. His little book abounds in such phrases as “This abuse has been long growing upon us,” “Adjectives of this sort are sometimes very improperly used,” and “Mistakes in the use of them [conjunctions] are very common.” Many of his decisions about English usage have come down to us virtually unchanged; few modern readers will fail to recognize such quotations from Lowth as

Two negatives in English destroy one another, or are equivalent to an affirmative.

Today, we are taught not to use double negatives. The sentence, “I don’t not like him,” actually means “I like him.”

Joseph Priestley’s *The Rudiments of English Grammar* (1761) is often contrasted (favorably from the modern point of view) with Lowth’s grammar. Although probably best known as the discoverer of oxygen, Priestley was also a chemist, inventor, philosopher, traveler, nonconformist minister, and the founder of the Unitarian Church in America. Born and bred in England, he was made an honorary citizen of France and eventually settled and later died in Pennsylvania. If Lowth stands for the conservative establishment of the time, Priestley may well be considered the liberal opposition. To some extent, this political difference is reflected in their approaches to grammar; certainly, Priestley more willingly accepted prevailing custom than did Lowth. However, the differences between their two works lie more in their attitudes than in the substance of what they say. Where Lowth is horrified by what he sees as error and says so emphatically, Priestley is gentler in his disapproval and tries to use reason rather than condemnation to persuade readers to change their ways. The following quotations concerning the use of *was* with *you* illustrate this difference.

You was, the second person plural of the pronoun placed in agreement with the first or third person singular of the verb, is an enormous solecism, and yet authors of the first rank have inadvertently fallen into it. [Lowth]

Many writers of no small reputation say *you was*, when speaking of a single person: but as the word *you* is confessedly *plural*, ought not the *verb*, agreeable to the analogy of all languages, to be plural too? moreover, we always say *you are*. [Priestley]

Both authors define grammar the same way.

Grammar is the art of rightly expressing our thoughts by words. [Lowth]

Grammar is the art of using words properly. [Priestley]

That is, to both Lowth and Priestley, grammar is an art (rather than a science) and is chiefly concerned with propriety. Both are concerned with the importance of analogy. Lowth was less willing to accept contemporary usage as a guide to correctness, perhaps partly because he had such a strong background in the classical languages and even knew Old English well enough to allow him

to compare earlier stages of the language with contemporary usage. Indeed, in his grammar, he frequently includes the Old English forms of words.

For most of the EMnE period, American schools used British grammars. But after the Revolution, many Americans were eager to assert their linguistic independence from the mother country. In 1784, Noah Webster published his *Plain and Comprehensive Grammar* to compete with the grammars of Lowth and other British authors. The emancipation from British models is, however, more apparent in intent than in content. Webster said that he would base his rules on existing usage, thus employing a descriptive approach to grammar. But he himself was dismayed by the usage of English-speaking immigrants (especially Irish and Scots), and his grammar ended up almost as prescriptive (seeking to impose rules) as the contemporary British grammars. His definition of grammar is virtually identical to those of Lowth and Priestley (though some might say that his addition of *dispatch* reflects an early American emphasis on speed and efficiency).

Grammar is the art of communicating thoughts by words with propriety and dispatch.

Still, on the whole, Webster was less dogmatic in his pronouncements and more willing to accept the inevitability of language change, as the following quotation illustrates.

It is very common to hear these phrases, *it is me*, *it was him*. These appear not strictly grammatical, but have such a prevalence in English, and in other modern languages derived from the same source, it inclines me to think, that there may be reasons for them, which are not now understood.

The specific rules of usage established—sometimes manufactured—by the eighteenth-century grammarians have a mixed record of survival in the early twenty-first century. Most educated users of English take for granted and automatically observe the strictures against double negatives and double comparatives and superlatives. Repeated but not observed (or observed in writing only) are the rule against split infinitives and the distinction between *between* and *among*. Few native users, even in writing, employ *shall* for the first-person future or bother to avoid ending a sentence with a preposition.

The deeper, more pervasive, and more pernicious influence of the eighteenth-century prescriptive grammarians lies in their having made “correct” usage a moral rather than simply a practical matter. If we want to be respected and admired, we must conform to the linguistic practices of the groups by whom we wish to be accepted. However, using *ain’t* is not sinful; it is simply against our self-interest. The blurring of this distinction has led to widespread feelings of guilt about one’s own usage; it is the direct inheritance of the school grammarians of the eighteenth century.

The eighteenth-century grammarians can be forgiven their optimism that linguistic behavior could be controlled like traffic in a tunnel—after all, this was the age of codification and classification, a time with a place for everything and

everything in its place. Less forgivable was their approach to the anomalies of linguistic reality. For all his beautifully logical taxonomy, Linnaeus had to make do, to make ad hoc adjustments to his system when he encountered, say, a duck-billed platypus. He could not and did not ignore the data of the real world. But when the grammarians encountered such embarrassments, their approach was to try to get rid of them entirely, to legislate them out of the language.

Nonetheless, we should not overmalign the school grammarians. They were not deliberate linguistic tyrants, nor did they promote class warfare. They responded to a real demand on the part of people who wanted simple, clear-cut answers to usage questions, people who asked for concrete instruction and not abstract theory. We can fault the grammarians for the false information they gave, but not for the fact that they gave information. Today's linguists assume that grammars have orderly rules and that their task is to discover and describe them; the eighteenth-century grammarians saw their task as one of imposing rules where they assumed that none had previously existed.

Varieties of English

Even as England was being united by language during the EMnE period, that is, by having English as the dominant spoken and written language (though Welsh was still strong in Wales and Scots Gaelic in the Highlands of Scotland), language was also becoming a divisive instrument. Differences in varieties of English had existed from the beginning of the language itself, but we have almost no surviving evidence of the attitudes toward these differences until the Middle English period, when writers first mention the diversity of regional dialects within the country. From the sixteenth century on, however, the development of standard spoken and written forms of English greatly heightened the awareness that not everyone who used the language used it in the same way. While this is not the place to treat in detail the multiple and complex attitudes toward linguistic diversity in English, we can at least mention some of the types of diversity recognized by writers of the period. These include (1) regional dialects, (2) class dialects, (3) occupational dialects, (4) gender differences, and (5) foreigners' imperfect mastery of English.

Regional Dialects As we have just noted, comments (usually negative) about regional differences appear as early as the fourteenth century, when the chief division seems to have been between the North and the South of England. For example, in the early fourteenth-century work *Cursor Mundi*, the poet, discussing his source, says *In suthrin englijs was it drawn, / And i haue turned it till vr aun / Lantage of þe norþren lede, / þat can nan oþer englijs rede* ("It was written in southern English, and I have turned it into our own language of the northern people, who can't read any other English"). By the sixteenth century, mention—and usually condemnation—of regional dialects was widespread. For example, in his *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), George Puttenham says that the English spoken in the North of England "is not so Courtly nor so currant as our Southerne English is, no more is the far Westernne mans speach." He recommends as a model "the

usuall speach of the Court, and that of London and the shires lying about London within lx myles [60 miles], and not much above.” Nor was it only the speech of the North and West that was condemned. Shakespeare and other Elizabethan dramatists at least implicitly mocked the Kentish dialect by putting it in the mouths of country bumpkins or buffoons.

Class Dialects The recognition of class dialects and the contempt of the upper classes for the speech of the lower classes can be illustrated by another quotation from Puttenham. In the same chapter in which he attacks the regional dialects of the North and West, Puttenham says that the well-bred man should not “follow the speach of a craftes man or carter, or other of the inferiour sort, though he be inhabitant or bred in the best towne... for such persons doe abuse good speeches by strange accents or ill shapen soundes, and false ortographie.” This prejudice against lower-class language was reinforced by classical rhetoric and its stratification of literary styles into high, middle, and low. More than a trace of the EMnE implicit and explicit correlation between literary levels and social levels can be found in Shakespeare, whose lower-class characters normally use prose and whose nobles speak in iambic pentameter. Ridicule of lower-class speech also appeared in the form of malapropisms attributed to the common people. Indeed, the very word *malapropism* comes from the character Mrs. Malaprop in Sheridan’s play *The Rivals* (1775), though the practice of putting such solecisms in the mouths of lower-class speakers antedates Sheridan.

Occupational Dialects The EMnE awareness of occupational dialects, or at least of occupational vocabulary, is reflected in the various specialized dictionaries that began to appear during the period. There were dictionaries (or glossaries) of legal terms and of technical vocabularies for such fields as mathematics and science. Henry Manwayring prepared *The Sea-Mans Dictionary* (1644) of maritime terms. The EMnE dictionaries of cant or thieves’ slang represent an overlapping of social and occupational dialects. (The dictionary of thieves’ slang, or cant, was used by hustlers and beggars as a secret language unknown to the respectable folk, which would keep their business from being known to one and all, especially authorities.) The dictionary compiler Coles makes a semi-apology for including cant in his 1676 dictionary by stating “‘Tis no disparagement to understand the Canting Terms. It may chance to save your throat from being cut, or (at least) your Pocket from being pickt.”

Gender Differences Comments about the differences between male and female speech also first appear in Early Modern English. Predictably, perhaps, women’s speech virtually always loses by comparison. We have already mentioned Cawdrey’s dictionary (1604), compiled for the “benefit & helpe of Ladies, Gentlewomen, or any other unskilfull persons.” The bias against women’s usage, or what was perceived as women’s usage, continued throughout the entire EMnE period and was enshrined in Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) in which one of Johnson’s pejorative labels was “womens

cant,” applied to such words as *flirtation*, *frightful*, and *horrid*. (Johnson, by the way, defines *cant* as “barbarous jargon.”)

Foreigners’ English Native speakers of English from OE times on obviously would have noticed that foreigners did not speak English as fluently or in the same way as they themselves did. By the sixteenth century, we find attempts, often stereotyped, to represent the imperfect speech of foreigners, including speakers of the Celtic dialects in Britain. For instance, in *Henry V*, Shakespeare pokes gentle fun at the speech of the Welshman Fluellen, mocking his mistakes in grammar and diction (“I assure you, there is very excellent services committed at the bridge”), phonology (e.g., *prave*, *pridge*, *plue* for “brave, bridge, blue”), and even his idioms, such as the frequent use of *look you*. In the same play, the phonological difficulties Katharine, daughter of the King and Queen of France, has in learning English are indicated in such lines as *d’hand*, *de fingre*, *de nailes*, *d’arma*, *de bilbow* (i.e., “the hand, the finger, the nails, the arm, the elbow”). Recognition of foreigners’ difficulties with English was not restricted to ridicule of their mistakes, however. The first texts designed to teach English to nonnative speakers also appeared in the EMnE period.

Inner History

EARLY MODERN ENGLISH PHONOLOGY

The Early Modern English period is the first in the history of English from which ample texts are available to illustrate the use of the language. A larger population, greater literacy, proliferation of texts through printing, and the increased chances of survival of materials because of the relative nearness in time to the present all have contributed to the vast numbers of texts dating from 1500 to 1800. However, the standardization and fossilization of spelling during this period have meant that most printed texts are of little help in reconstructing the phonological changes that occurred. In this respect, the poorly educated writer is of more assistance than the well-educated one because of former is more likely to spell “phonetically.” Some of our most valuable sources of information are personal letters, diaries, and governmental records kept by ill-educated clerks (particularly in colonial America). In addition, we have for the first time written statements about the language and its sounds. These, however, must be used with caution because the writers usually were not trained phoneticians, and they often indulged more in wishful thinking than in objective reporting.

As was true of Middle English, there were many local dialects, and, indeed, it seems that there were more acceptable variants *within* the standard language than is the case today. By the end of the EMnE period, new dialects were rising in the American colonies. Unfortunately, much of this dialectal variation is poorly understood today. Our discussion will of necessity be based primarily on the standard language in England.

TABLE 7.1 Consonant Phonemes of Present-Day English

Manner of Articulation		Point of Articulation				
		Bilabial	Labio-dental	Inter-dental	Alveolar	Alveo-palatal Velar
Stops	Voiceless	p			t	k
	Voiced	b			d	g
Affricates	Voiceless					ç
	Voiced					j
Fricatives	Voiceless		f	θ	s	ʃ h
	Voiced		v	ð	z	ʒ
Nasals		m			n	ŋ
Lateral					l	
Retroflex					r	
Semivowels		w				j (w)

Consonants

The present-day inventory of English consonants was established during the Early Modern English period. By 1800, the system was identical to that of today, so we can simply refer to Table 2.1. A comparison of Table 2.1 with Table 6.1 reveals that the only systemwide difference between Middle English and Early Modern English is the addition of phonemic /ŋ/ and /ʒ/ to the EMnE inventory (See Table 7.1).

W 7.3

The specific origins of /ŋ/ and /ʒ/ are discussed below; we will note here only that both could be accommodated easily because both filled gaps in the system. The addition of /ŋ/ gave three nasals parallel to the three sets of stops. That is, for the stops /p/ and /b/, there was the homorganic nasal /m/; for /t/ and /d/, the homorganic nasal /n/; and now, for /k/ and /g/, the homorganic nasal /ŋ/. Prior to the addition of /ʒ/, there had been the pairs of voiceless and voiced fricatives /f/ ~ /v/; /θ/ ~ /ð/; and /s/ ~ /z/. Only /ʃ/ had been without a corresponding voiced phoneme. The addition of /ʒ/ filled this gap.¹

Changes in Distribution of Consonants Although the only systemwide change in consonants between Middle English and Early Modern English was the addition of /ŋ/ and /ʒ/, numerous changes in the distribution of individual consonant phonemes occurred, some systemic, some only sporadic. Most of the systemic changes involved loss of consonants in particular environments, or, occasionally, the substitution of one consonant for another. The sporadic changes involved either substitution or spelling pronunciations (or both).

1. The phoneme /h/ is also a fricative and does not have a phonemic voiced counterpart. However, /h/ is anomalous in so many ways that it really is not a proper member of the set of fricatives in English.

- **/h/, [ç], and [x]** The postvocalic allophones of /h/, [ç], and [x] disappeared in most dialects during the course of EMnE, though [x] has survived in Scots until PDE. With some variation due to dialect mixture, [ç] and [x] usually disappeared completely before /t/ (*sight, straight, caught*, for example). In final position, they were either lost completely (*sigh, although*, for example) or became /f/ (*tough, laugh, cough*). In either position, the total loss of [x] or [ç] lengthened a preceding short vowel; hence ME /sɪçt/ ‘sight’, EMnE /sit/ (and ultimately PDE /saɪt/ because of the Great Vowel Shift).
- **The consonant /l/** The consonant /l/ was lost after low back vowels and before labial or velar consonants (*half, palm, folk, talk*) but not after other vowels (*film, silk, hulk*) or before dental or palatal consonants (*salt, bolt, Walsh*).
- **The consonants /t/ and /d/** The consonant /t/ and to a lesser extent /d/ tended to drop in consonant clusters involving /s/. Hence the normal PDE pronunciation of such words as *castle, hasten, wrestle* (without /t/) and *handsome* and *landscape* (without /d/). Sometimes these losses were of a /t/ that had itself been an unetymological intrusive /t/ in ME (*listen, hustle*). The loss of /t/ and /d/ was also, at least in some dialects, widespread in final position after another consonant. Colonial American records, for example, are full of such forms as *par, wes*, and *adjormen* (for *part, west*, and *adjournment*), and *lan, Arnol*, and *poun* (for *land, Arnold*, and *pound*).
- **The consonants /g/ and /k/** Probably in the late seventeenth century, /g/ and /k/ were lost in initial position before /n/, as in *gnaw, gnome, know*, and *knight*. During the eighteenth century, /w/ was lost before /r/ in initial position (*wrong, wrinkle, wrist*).
- **The phoneme ŋ** During OE and ME, the combination of *ng* had been pronounced /ŋg/, with the /ŋ/ being merely the allophone of /n/ that appeared before /k/ or /g/. During EMnE, the /g/ was lost when the combination appeared in final position. This loss made /ŋ/ phonemic because it now contrasted with /n/ in final position, as in *sin* versus *sing*. In some dialects, however, a final unstressed /ŋ/ tended to become /n/, a phenomenon commonly though erroneously called “*g*-dropping.” In many dialects, the /ŋ/ has been replaced today under the influence of spelling, but the /n/ pronunciation during EMnE is attested by the high frequency of such semiliterate spellings as *tacklin, stockens*, and *shilin* (for *tackling, stockings*, and *shilling*) and even of reverse spellings like *garding, muzling*, and *ruinge* for *garden, muslin*, and *ruin*.

The combination of the tendency for final unstressed /ŋ/ to become /n/ and the tendency for /t/ and /d/ to be lost after /n/ explains such otherwise inexplicable EMnE misspellings as *behing* and *bearind* for *behind* and *bearing*. These words were pronounced /biham/ and /berɪn/. The writers, however, knew that many such words were properly spelled with an additional consonant at the end. In these cases, the writers simply guessed wrong and used *g* instead of *d* in *behind* and *d* instead of *g* in *bearing*.

- **The loss of /r/** The loss of /r/ before /s/ had begun as early as ME. By EMnE, its loss had extended to other positions, at least in some dialects. By the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, semiliterate spellings like *quater*, *Mach*, and *brothe* (for *quarter*, *March*, and *brother*) reveal that it was regularly dropped in unstressed positions and even in stressed positions after back vowels. During the eighteenth century, the loss of /r/ before a consonant or finally became general in the standard language in England (though not in all dialects, most notably Scots). In America, *r*-lessness prevailed along the Atlantic seaboard areas with close ties to England but not in the more inland settlements, a pattern that survives to the present day.
- **Unstressed Vowels** As noted in Chapter 6, unstressed vowels were reduced to /ɪ/ or /ə/ during ME. This process continued during most of the EMnE period; contemporary spellings like *tenner*, *venter*, and *peculiar* (for *tenure*, *venture*, *peculiar*) suggest how far it had progressed. But also during EMnE, a tendency arose to develop the palatal semivowel /j/ before an unstressed vowel in medial position *after* the major stress. Thereafter, words like *tenure* and *peculiar*, formerly pronounced /ténər/ and /pækjúlər/, became /ténjər/ and /pækjúljər/.² However, if the preceding consonant was /s/, /z/, /t/, or /d/, a further change took place whereby the consonant fused with the following /j/ to produce a palatal fricative or affricate.

/sj/ > /ʃ/ as in *nation*, *pressure*, *ocean*

/zj/ > /ʒ/ as in *seizure*, *pleasure*, *usual*, *vision*

/tj/ > /tʃ/ as in *creature*, *ancient*, *lecture*, *fortune*

/dj/ > /dʒ/ as in *soldier*, *gradual*, *residual*, *grandeur*

This **assibilation** (the process by which sounds change to sibilants) is the origin of the phoneme /ʒ/ in English. Once /ʒ/ had become phonemic, it could be extended to other positions, as in, for instance, the PDE loanwords from French *garage* and *beige* (though many speakers still use /j/ and not /ʒ/ in such words).

Assibilation was not without exception, and dialectal differences remain to this day. For example, the noun *graduate* is frequently heard as /græduət/, especially in British English. Conversely, *immediately* is often pronounced with assibilation as /ɪmɪjətli/ in Britain, much less often in American English. Further, the pronunciations of a number of words that once had assibilated consonants have reverted to their earlier forms, at least in standard English. Examples include *idiot*, *tedious*, and *Indian* (compare the old dialect spelling *Injun*).

- **/d/ and /f/**. In a relatively minor change, earlier English /d/ changed to /ð/ when it followed the major stress and preceded /r/. For example, OE *fæder*, *mōdor*, *slidrian*, *gadrian*, and ME *widderen* became *father*, *mother*, *slither*,

2. The prepalatalization stage has left traces in such colloquial pronunciations as /figər/ for *figure* and /partɪkələr/ for *particular*, or in the dialectal *critter* for *creature*.

gather, and *with*. This change did not occur in French loanwords (*modern*, *consider*), in the comparative suffix *-er* (*wider*), or in the agentive suffix (*reader*). In a kind of reverse change, earlier /ð/ often became /d/ after /r/ or before /l/: thus OE *mordor*, *byrðen*, *fiðele* and PDE *murder*, *burden*, *fiddle*. This latter change did not always occur, so we still have /ð/ in *farthing* and *further* (but the spelling *furder* for *further* is so frequent in the seventeenth century that some dialects must have undergone the change here too).

Spelling Pronunciations In the course of EMnE, literacy became sufficiently widespread to cause a number of spelling pronunciations. For instance, a number of loanwords from French and Latin used *th* to spell /t/. Because *th* was the normal English spelling for /θ/, English speakers altered their pronunciations in such words to /θ/. Examples include *anthem*, *throne*, *author*, and *orthography*. The process extended to native words in which *t* and *h* had come together as the result of compounding; hence *Gotham*, *Wrentham*, and *Waltham*, all originally compounds with the second element *-ham* (as if today we were to pronounce *courthouse* as /kɔrθaʊs/). The change was even more common in America than in Britain: The British still pronounce the name *Anthony* with a /t/, but speakers of American English have /θ/. As we noted earlier, the *Thames* River in England is /təmz/, but in Connecticut it is the /θəmz/.

Middle English had borrowed many words from French or Latin that were spelled with an unpronounced initial *h*. By spelling pronunciation almost all of these loans came to be pronounced with /h/ during EMnE (for example, *habit*, *hctic*, *history*, *horror*, *human*). *Hour*, *honor*, and *heir* escaped this almost universal trend (but *heritage*, from the same ultimate root as *heir*, acquired /h/). In British English *herb* also has /h/, but in American English it does not.

Knowledge of Latin roots caused the unhistorical introduction of *l* into the spelling of loans that had entered English in a French form without the *l*. Again, the influence of spelling led to the pronunciation of the *l*. Examples include *fault*, *assault*, *falcon*, *vault* (ME and Old French *faute*, *assaut*, *faucon*, *vaute*; Vulgar Latin *fallita*, *assaltus*, *falcō*, *volūtum*). Among the numerous other words respelled under Latin influence and then repronounced during EMnE are *adventure*, *admiral*, *perfit*, and *baptism* (ME *aventure*, *amiral*, *perfit*, *bapteme*).

Spelling pronunciations did not, however, always prevail. For instance, despite the respelling of the French loans *receite*, *dette*, and *doute* as *receipt*, *debt*, and *doubt* under the influence of Latin *receptus*, *dēbitus*, and *dubitāre*, English speakers have thus far resisted pronouncing the unhistorical *p* and *b* in these words.

Vowels

The changes in English consonants during EMnE were relatively minor. The two new phonemes (/ŋ/ and /ʒ/) both filled preexisting gaps, so they actually helped to stabilize the system. Otherwise, there were only slight readjustments in the distribution of some consonants. However, the vocalic system of English underwent a greater change than at any other time in the history of the

Short Vowels		Long Vowels (GVS)		Diphthongs	
ME	EMnE	ME	EMnE	ME	EMnE
ɪ	ɪ	ī → əɪ → aɪ		ɪu	u, ju
ɛ	ɛ	ē → i		ɛʊ	u, ju
ə	ə	ē → ē → i, e		aʊ	ɔ
a	æ, a	ā → æ → ē → e		ɔʊ	o
ʊ	ə, ʊ	ū → əʊ → aʊ		aɪ	e
ɔ	ɔ, a, æ	ō → u		ʊɪ	ɔɪ
		ṽ → o		ɔɪ	ɔɪ

GVS = Great Vowel Shift

FIGURE 7.5 EMnE Development of ME Vowels.

language. The short vowels experienced a number of adjustments, but the major activity concerned the ME long vowels. The ultimate result of the sweeping sound change known as the Great Vowel Shift (GVS) was the loss of length as a distinctive feature of English vowels and hence a restructuring of the entire system, a phonological change as far-reaching in its effects as the prehistoric consonant change described by Grimm's and Verner's laws.

Although the vowel changes of EMnE are fairly well understood, dating them precisely is difficult because the standardization of English spelling early in EMnE meant that future changes were usually not reflected in spelling. In addition, English has always had fewer vowel graphemes than phonemes (and it lost one of these graphemes, ⟨æ⟩, early in ME). Even when misspellings make us suspect that a change has taken place, we normally cannot be sure exactly what the misspelling represents.

Before launching into the details of the Great Vowel Shift, let us summarize the major changes between Middle English and Early Modern English. Figure 7.5 presents the vowel picture for the standard language at the end of Middle English. It does not include minor conditioned or sporadic changes, nor does it reflect the varying developments of different dialects.

A comparison of the EMnE columns of Figure 7.5 with Figures 2.2 and 2.3 reveals that the PDE vowel inventory was achieved by the end of the EMnE period, although there have been some allophonic and distributional changes since 1800, and although a number of dialects have developed somewhat differently.

The Great Vowel Shift Under the sound change known as the Great Vowel Shift (GVS), all the ME long vowels came to be pronounced in a higher position. Those that were already in the highest position “fell off the top” and became diphthongs. Short vowels were not affected. Figure 7.6 illustrates the ME long vowels, the changes involved in the GVS, and the resulting configuration.

Precise dating of the GVS is impossible and, in any case, varied from dialect to dialect. In general, the process began in late ME and was pretty much over by the end of the eighteenth century in standard English.

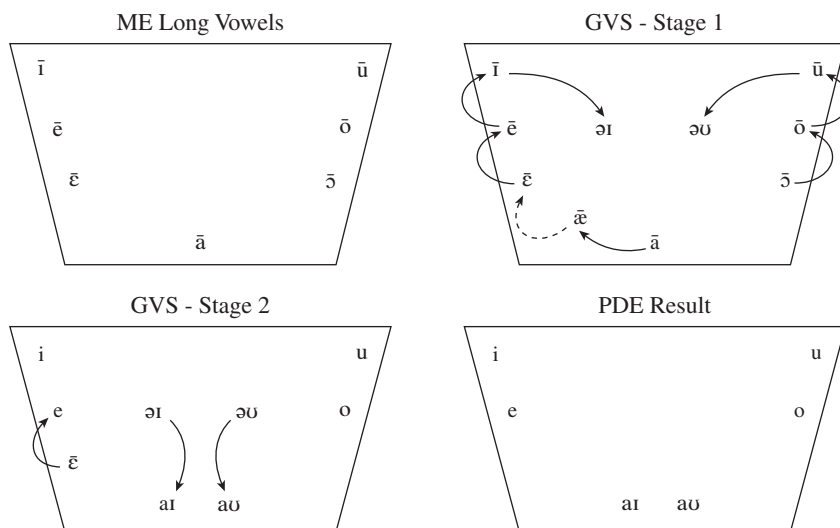


FIGURE 7.6 The Great Vowel Shift.

The exact cause of the Great Vowel Shift has been the subject of intense scholarly debate. One theory is that English changed due to the great influx of French loanwords. In a related vein, others believe that the loanwords from Romance languages helped change the sound of English vowels. We know that foreign loans are the reason why the final *-e* and inflections were lost from the English language, so there is a good reason to believe that foreign borrowing also influenced the phonology of English. Another theory is that the mass migrations to the southeast to find safe haven from the Black Plague of the fourteenth century caused speakers to modify their differences in accents and thus standardize their vowels. This mixing of different dialects in the London region and the rise of London English as the standardized dialect in the fifteenth century caused the change to spread outward from London. Another reason behind the Great Vowel Shift is the chain rule: once the /i/ and /u/ moved up, the vowels below it had “room” to fill in below it.

Scholars do not agree on all the details, but it is likely that at least some of the changes took several generations to reach their final stage. For example, by Shakespeare’s day, ME / \bar{i} / and / \bar{u} / were probably pronounced / əI / and / əU /, respectively. The earliest changes must have been with the ME high vowels / \bar{i} / and / \bar{u} /; after they had undergone a clearly perceptible shift, the next highest vowels, / \bar{e} / and / \bar{o} /, were free to move into the positions formerly held by ME / \bar{i} / and / \bar{u} / . In other words, if ME / \bar{e} / had changed *before* ME / \bar{i} /, it would have coalesced with ME / \bar{i} /, and ME words with / \bar{i} / and with / \bar{e} / would both be pronounced with / aI / today. This merger did not occur: ME *bite* ‘bite’ and *bete* ‘beet’ are still distinct in PDE.

Note that we have not indicated vowel length by a macron in the final diagram in Figure 7.5. This omission is intentional. After the GVS, vowel length

Hidden Animals

Like those pictures in which we are told to find concealed faces in unlikely spots, some English words contain the hidden names of animals. For example, *chenille*, the tufted fabric from which bedspreads and rugs are made, is the French word for “caterpillar.” The French word itself is from Latin *canicula*, a diminutive of *canis* ‘dog’—caterpillars were so called because of their furry bodies. Another doggy word is *cynosure*, from Greek *kunosoura* ‘dog’s tail’; *kunosoura* is the Greek name for the Little Dipper.

The word *pedigree* is from Old French *pie de grue* ‘crane’s foot’, named thus from the claw-shaped marks used to show lines of succession. Also from Old French is *dauphin* ‘dolphin’. The term goes back to the coat of arms of the lords of Viennois, France, which had three dolphins on it. The word *muscle* is ultimately from Latin *mūsculus* ‘little mouse’, presumably from the appearance of muscles rippling beneath the skin. *Easel* comes from Dutch *ezel* ‘ass’ and got its name because of its shape, just as *sawhorse* did.

was no longer phonemic in English, and only qualitative differences distinguished most English vowels in most dialects. Actually, the long/short distinction was never crucial in English, or, in more technical terminology, it never carried a high functional load. Even in Old English, there were few minimal pairs, that is, word pairs like *gōd* ‘good’ and *god* ‘God’ distinguished in pronunciation only by the length of their vowels. In Middle English, the long/short distinction was seriously eroded when length became tied to syllable structure in many words and hence was often redundant. But the “pairing” of long and short vowels was still relatively easy in ME because they were qualitatively similar. However, the GVS destroyed this match (even though it was often retained in spelling). That is, for ME speakers, the vowels of *bit* /bīt/ and *bite* /bīt/ were still clearly similar, if not identical, except for length. After the GVS, these words were /bit/ and /bite/; the phonological relationship between the two vowels had been destroyed. Of course, PDE vowels do vary in their actual phonetic length—the vowel of *bee* is much longer than the vowel of *beet*—but the distinction today is no longer phonemic. It is allophonic only, conditioned by the environment of the vowel.

Because of dialectal variation followed by dialect mixture, there are a few apparent exceptions to the GVS, most of them concerning ME /ē/ and /ō/. ME /ē/ normally became /i/, but in some words it apparently shortened prior to the GVS; hence such words as *threat*, *head*, *death*, and *deaf* still have /e/ today. (*Cheat*, *plead*, *wreath*, *leaf*, and so on show the regular development of ME /ē/.) In a few other words, ME /ē/ stopped at /ē/ and did not become /i/; examples include *break*, *yea*, *steak*, *great*. The situation was still undergoing change in late EMnE, as the following couplet from Alexander Pope’s *Rape of the Lock* illustrates; Pope would have pronounced *tea* as /te/.

Soft yielding minds to water glide away,
And sip, with Nymphs, their elemental tea. (ll. 61–62)

There is even greater fluctuation among words with ME /ō/. Many predictably became /u/, for example, *boot*, *loose*, *mood*, *pool*, *soon*. Others then shortened from /u/ to /ʊ/; they include *foot*, *good*, *hook*, and *wood*. In a few cases, this /ʊ/ further unrounded to /ə/, as in *flood* and *blood*. Pope's rhyming of *good* and *blood* in these lines from "Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady" (1717) shows that the vowel of *blood* had not yet unrounded to /ə/.

But thou, false guardian of a charge too good,
Thou, mean deserter of thy brother's blood! (ll. 29–30)

This indecisive state of affairs has persisted into PDE for a number of words whose pronunciation varies between /u/ and /ʊ/, even within the same dialectal area. Examples include *root*, *hoop*, *soot*, *roof*, *room*.

Development of Short Vowels EMnE saw no sweeping, systemic changes in ME short vowels parallel to the GVS of ME long vowels. Nonetheless, all the ME short vowels were involved in changes of one kind or another, some more limited or temporary than others.

1. All remaining final unstressed *-e*'s (= /ə/) from ME were lost during EMnE, including those of noun plurals and third-person singular present-indicative endings, as well as singular past-tense endings, except in the environments where they remain to this day as /ə/ or /ɪ/ (as in the final vowels of *judges*, *passes*, *wanted*).
2. In general, ME /a/, if indeed it had been /a/ and not /æ/, became /æ/ in EMnE. However, in the seventeenth century, this /æ/ reverted to /a/ before /r/, as in *harm*, *scarf*, *hard*, *park*. During the eighteenth century, /æ/ became /a/ before voiceless fricatives in the standard English of southern England and in the New England dialects of areas most closely tied to the mother country. In these dialects, /a/ remains to this day in this environment (*staff*, *class*, *path*, *fast*, *half*). The change, however, never occurred in the first place if the fricative was followed by another vowel (*classical*, *passage*).
Before /l/, /a/ became /ɔ/ instead of /æ/ (*all*, *fall*, *walk*, *salt*, *chalk*, *halt*). In many dialects, ME /a/ also became /ɔ/ after /w/ (*want*, *wash*, *reward*, *swan*, *quart*). This change did not occur if the vowel preceded a velar consonant (*wax*, *quack*, *wag*, *wangle*, *swagger*, *twang*).
3. ME /ʊ/ centered and unrounded to /ə/ in most environments (*run*, *mud*, *gull*, *cut*, *hum*, *cup*). The unrounding did not occur if /ʊ/ was "protected" by a preceding labial consonant and followed by /l/, /ʃ/, or /č/ (*full*, *pull*, *bull*, *push*, *bush*, *butcher*). There were some exceptions, and dialectal variation remains to this day in the pronunciation of such words as *bulky*, *bulge*, and *shrub*.
4. Over the long course, English /ɪ/ and /ɛ/ have remained remarkably stable. Nevertheless, the two sounds seem to have been confused in many dialects during EMnE, a confusion revealed in hundreds of semiliterate spellings such as *rever*, *skellet*, *wedth*, *tell*, and *derect* (for *river*, *skillet*, *width*, *till*, and *direct*).

Conversely, we find spellings like *niver*, *dwilling*, *divell*, and *chist* (for *never*, *dwelling*, *devil*, and *chest*). Most of these vowels have since reverted to their original values, but the colloquial pronunciations *pritty*, and *git* still reflect the EMnE situation.

Also during EMnE, /ε/ followed by a nasal regularly and permanently changed to /ɪ/ in many words. Examples include *wing*, *single*, *hinge*, *fringe*, *mingle*, and *nimble* (ME *wenge*, *sengle*, *heng*, *frenge*, *mengle(n)*, and *nem(b)yl*). This tendency of a following nasal to raise /ε/ to /ɪ/ dates to prehistoric times in Germanic languages and continues to the present day. In many contemporary American dialects, especially in the southern areas of the country, words like *pen*, *sense*, and *them* are pronounced with /ɪ/.

5. Before /l/, ME /ɔ/ generally became /o/ (*bolt*, *cold*, *old*, *bowl*, *hold*). In other environments, ME /ɔ/ was retained in standard British English and some American dialects. However, a dialectal variant in Britain that was to become extensively used in the United States was /a/ for ME /ɔ/. Examples are numerous, including *hot*, *rock*, *pocket*, *yonder*, *top*, and *shot*. Dialect mixture in the United States is so widespread that the same speaker may have, say, /a/ in *frog* and /ɔ/ in *log*.

The Influence of a Following /r/ In general, a following /r/ tends to lower vowels. During late ME and continuing throughout EMnE, there was a widespread lowering of /εr/ to /ar/. In some instances, the lowering was permanent, and the words involved were eventually respelled to reflect the change. For example, modern *far*, *star*, *dark*, *farm*, and *barn* were *fer*, *sterre*, *derk*, *ferme*, and *bern* in Middle English. In most cases, however, the pronunciation later reverted to /εr/ (which then became /ər/); it did so, for example, in the words often spelled *sarvant*, *sarmon*, *sartain*, *vardict*, and *starling* in EMnE (PDE *servant*, *sermon*, *certain*, *verdict*, *sterling*). Occasionally, doublets have survived: *clerk/clark*, *vermin/varmint*, *person/parson*, and *university/varsity*. In the case of *sergeant*, the spelling has not changed to reflect the /ar/ pronunciation.

Later than the lowering of /εr/ to /ar/, /ɪ/, /ε/, and /ʊ/ all lowered and centered to /ə/ before a following /r/; hence the present-day pronunciations of such words as *girl*, *dirty*, *her*, *fern*, *early*, *hurt*, and *curse*. This change is so recent that the various dialects of English do not reflect it in the same way. In particular, most Scots dialects still retain the original vowels in this position.

In many other words, a following /r/ blocked the GVS's raising or diphthongization of ME /ē/, /ō/, and /ū/ to /i/, /u/, and /aʊ/, respectively. Thus we find apparent exceptions to the GVS in such words as *wear*, *bear*, *floor*, *sword*, *course*, and *court*. Again there is still a fair amount of dialectal variation in words like *poor*, *tour*, and *moor*.

Development of Diphthongs At all periods in the history of English, the tendency has existed for diphthongs to “smooth,” that is, to become simple vowels, and for new diphthongs to arise. The GVS provided EMnE with a number of new diphthongs, but at the same time almost all the ME diphthongs smoothed.

As Figure 7.5 shows, ME probably had seven diphthongs: /ɪʊ/, /ɛʊ/, /aʊ/, /ʊɪ/, /aɪ/, /ɔɪ/, and /ɔʊ/. All but /ʊɪ/ and /ɔɪ/ became simple vowels, and these two coalesced into the single diphthong /ɔɪ/.

- **ME /ɪʊ/ and /ɛʊ/.** By the late ME, /ɪʊ/ and /ɛʊ/ had fallen together as /ɪʊ/. Then, perhaps in the sixteenth century this /ɪʊ/ became /ju/ and has remained /ju/ in scores of words to the present day. Examples include *pure*, *mute*, *hew*, *cute*, *beauty*, and *pewter*. After a labial consonant, /ju/ almost always remains, but after other consonants, many dialects have simplified /ju/ to /u/. Among the words that show dialectal variation in PDE are *new*, *fruit*, *glue*, *shrew*, *rude*, *duty*, and *lute*.
- **ME /aʊ/.** ME /aʊ/ became /ɔ/ in EMnE. A few examples are *cause*, *hawk*, *claw*, *autumn*, and *aught*. Before /l/ plus a labial consonant, however, ME /aʊ/ became /a/ or /æ/, as in *half*, *calf*, *calm*, and *palm*, and /l/ was lost.
- **ME /ɔʊ/.** ME /ɔʊ/ became EMnE /o/ as in *know*, *blow*, *soul*, and *grow*. Note that this /o/ is actually diphthongized in most dialects of English today.
- **ME /aɪ/.** ME /aɪ/ smoothed to EMnE /e/; examples include *day*, *pay*, *raise*, *stake*, and *eight*. Like /o/, /e/ is usually somewhat diphthongized in PDE.
- **ME /ʊɪ/ and /ɔɪ/.** ME had acquired the two diphthongs /ʊɪ/ and /ɔɪ/ in French loanwords. These diphthongs coalesced as /ɔɪ/ in most dialects by EMnE but remained as /əɪ/. In the following lines from the Earl of Rochester's "A Satire Against Mankind" (1675), the vowel of both *design* and *join* was probably /əɪ/.

Look to the bottom of his vast design
Wherein Man's wisdom, power, and glory join; (ll. 153–54)

Examples of earlier /ʊɪ/ are *toil*, *boil*, *poison*, *soil*, and *destroy*; from earlier /ɔɪ/ are *joy*, *avoid*, *royal*, *boy*, and *choice*.

Prosody

So far as we can tell, the clause and sentence rhythms of English have remained essentially the same from Old English times on. Questions to which an answer of "yes" or "no" is expected have risen in pitch at the end, statements have ended with a falling pitch, and so forth. Furthermore, the general tendency to stress the first syllable of words has always characterized English. We have no reason to believe that Early Modern English differed significantly from Present-Day English in these respects.

Nonetheless, the evidence of poetry and of occasional statements by contemporary speakers indicates that there were a number of minor differences between the prosody of EMnE and that of PDE. The most obvious is variation in the placement of the major stress of polysyllabic words, especially loanwords from French or Latin. For example, an initial stress (as in PDE) on *sinister* in the

following line from Shakespeare's *Henry V* results in a rough scansion,³ but stressing the second syllable makes it a smooth line.

'Tis nó síníster nó no áwkward cláim

Similarly, Shakespeare seems to have had the major stress on the second syllable of words such as *opportune*, *welcome*, and *contract* (as noun). Yet, Shakespeare sometimes has the major stress on the first syllable of words that today usually have it on the second syllable; examples include *cement*, *concealed*, *humane*, and *mature*. The evidence of poetry also suggests that secondary stresses often occurred on syllables that today have reduced stress. In this respect, EMnE perhaps was more like American English today than like contemporary British English; compare British *secretary* with American *secretary*, or, conversely, the Scots and Irish pronunciation *Lóndonderry* (Northern Ireland) with American *Lóndonderry* (New Hampshire).

The Elizabethans seemingly accepted variant pronunciations of many more words than do English speakers today; for example, Shakespeare sometimes stressed *commendable* and *triumphing* on the first syllable, sometimes on the second. Such variation is explainable by the fact that it was during this period that English was in the process of developing the complex but automatic rules for stress placement of Latinate words and their derivatives that characterize the language today.

Some contractions appear in texts written prior to the EMnE period (such as OE *nelle* for *ne wille* 'not want'). However, it was not until EMnE that extensive patterns of contractions of pronouns, auxiliary verbs, and prepositions appear in writing. The rules for contracting in EMnE were not, however, those of PDE. In general, EMnE contracted forms tended to be **proclitic** (contracting the first word, as in *'tis*), whereas PDE contractions are **enclitic** (contracting the second word, as in *it's*). Therefore we find in Shakespeare such forms as *'twill* and *h'were* for *it will* and *he were*. Also unlike PDE was the contraction of prepositions with a following pronoun, as in *in's* 'in his' and *w'us* 'with us', and even three-part contractions like *i'th'eye* 'in the eye'. EMnE did have some enclitic contractions, such as *did't* and *don't* (for *did it* and *done it*), but this particular enclitic pattern has not survived into PDE. Conspicuously absent from Shakespearean English is the contraction of auxiliary verbs and a following *not* (as in PDE *isn't*, *can't*); this was not to appear until the seventeenth century and was infrequent until the eighteenth century.

EARLY MODERN ENGLISH GRAPHICS

Paradoxical though it may seem, the spelling patterns of PDE were established at the beginning of EMnE, but the graphemes (letters) themselves were not established in their current forms until well into the EMnE period. Early in EMnE,

W 7.6

3. Scansion is the dividing of verse into feet by indicating accents and counting syllables to determine the meter of a poem.

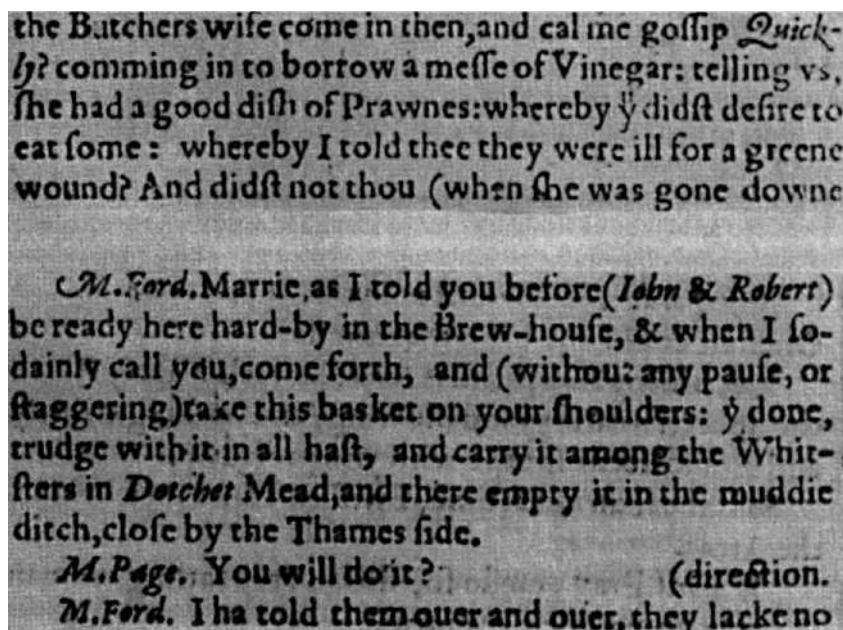


FIGURE 7.7 EMNe Graphic Forms.

Facsimile of excerpts from *Henry IV* (p. 79) and *Merry Wives of Windsor* (p. 49) in the First folio of Mr William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies (London, 1623). Reproduced by permission of the Yale Univeristy Press and the Elizabethan Club of Yale Univeristy.

the *yogh* (*ȝ*) was abandoned, being replaced by *gh*, *y*, or *s*. The thorn (*þ*) lasted somewhat longer. By the seventeenth century, however, it had become identical in shape to *y* and was used to represent /ð/ or /θ/ only in function words like *thou* and *that*, as illustrated in Figure 7.7 reproductions of printed lines from the First Folio of Shakespeare; the first passage is from *Henry IV Part 2* and the second is from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

As Figure 7.7 shows, *þ* was not universal even in words like *thou*; in line 5, *thou* is spelled with *th*. Actually, in the First Folio, *þ* is used primarily in abbreviations to save space in the line. It appears chiefly in prose passages where the line extends to the right margin.

Figure 7.7 also reveals that the present-day practice of using *i* and *u* only as vowel symbols and *j* and *v* only as consonants was not yet established—this change occurred later in the seventeenth century. Prior to then, *j* was rarely used at all, and *i* represented both the vowel and the consonant /j/. Line 6 illustrates *i* in its consonant function (*Iohn*). During the same period, *v* stood for both vowel and consonant at the beginning of a word (*vs* and *Vinegar*, l. 2), and *u* for both vowel and consonant elsewhere (*muddie*, l. 11; *ouer*, l. 14).

Until the eighteenth century, “long *s*” (*messe*, l. 2, *desire*, l. 3, *close* and *side*, l. 12) was normally used everywhere except at the end of words (*vs*, l. 2, *was*, l. 5). However, even in the First Folio, “long *s*” can be seen giving way to the form used everywhere today; in the word *basket* (l. 9), the short *s* is used where long *s* would be expected.

Spelling and Punctuation

As we described earlier in this chapter, modern spelling pattern had been formulated in their essential details during late ME and early EMnE. By the end of the seventeenth century, the principle of a fixed spelling for every word was firmly established for printed works, and, over the course of the following century, “personal” spelling followed suit.

One inconsistency of PDE spelling originated as an attempt at spelling reform. In early EMnE, the spelling ⟨ea⟩ was introduced for words with /ē/ (from ME /ē/) to distinguish them from words with /i/ (from ME /ē/). Thus, for instance, what had been *bete* ‘beat’ in ME was now spelled ⟨beat⟩, while ME *bete* ‘beet’ was spelled ⟨beet⟩, and similarly for many pairs of words such as *peal/peel*, *leak/leek*, and *weak/week*. However, this spelling change occurred during the earlier stages of the GVS. As a result of the final stages of the GVS, many words with ME /ē/ moved from /e/ to /i/, and words like *beet* and *beat* became identical in pronunciation. Hence the ⟨ea⟩ spelling ended up as nothing more than a variant spelling for /i/ in many words.

As was also mentioned earlier, during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, knowledge of Latin roots was responsible for changing the spelling (though not the pronunciation) of a number of French loans into English. For example, ME *vitaille*, *rime*, and *endite(n)* were respelled as *virtual(s)*, *rhyme*, and *indict*, respectively, under the influence of Latin *virtualia*, *rhythmus*, and *indictus*. Sometimes the etymologies were false: even though it was a native English word, OE *īegland*, ME *ilond* was mistakenly assumed to have come from Latin *insula* or Old French *isle*, so it was respelled *island*. Compounding the confusion, ME *eile* was associated somehow with *isle* and respelled *aisle*, despite its actual origin in Latin *āla* ‘wing’. By analogy with native words like *bright* and *light*, ME *delite* was respelled *delight* (etymologically, it goes back to Latin *delectare*).

During most of the EMnE period, capitalization remained, if not exactly random, at least haphazard. The first words of sentences were capitalized, as were proper nouns. However, common nouns were also often capitalized for no reason apparent to the modern eye. For instance, in Figure 7.7 the common nouns *Butchers*, *Vinegar*, *Praunes*, and *Brew-house* are all capitalized, though the nouns *gossip*, *messe*, *disk*, *wound*, *pause*, and *basket* are not.

Punctuation during the EMnE period usually followed the models of Continental printers. During the sixteenth century, the comma replaced the virgule (/) as the primary mark of internal punctuation in the sentence, and the semicolon was introduced. The apostrophe was used for contractions (and more contractions appeared in print than is conventional today) but often not consistently. For example, Shakespeare’s First Folio has both *Ile* and *I’le* for *I’ll*; *ith* and *i’th* for *in the*. Past tense and past participle endings appear in the First Folio in both contracted and uncontracted spellings, frequently for no apparent metrical reason; *banished*, for instance, is spelled *banisht*, *banished*, and *banish’d*. The apostrophe was not used to mark possessives until late in EMnE; see the Butchers wife in line 1 of Figure 7.7. By the end of EMnE, modern marks of punctuation had been established, although eighteenth-century punctuation was often much

The Ubiquitous John

Over the centuries, no masculine given name has been more popular than *John*, a name that has never gone out of fashion. Its popularity is reflected in the scores of common nouns or other words that have been made from *John* or a variant of *John*. Thus we have *John Bull* as a personification of England, *John Barleycorn* as a personification of liquor, *John Doe* as a fictitious legal person, and *John Dory* as the name of two kinds of fish. When a woman wants to tell a man that she prefers someone else, she writes him a *Dear John*; and of course, in the United States people answer the call of nature in an uncapitalized *john*.

A *Johnny-jump-up* is a plant, a *Johnny-on-the-spot* is a person in the right place at the right time, a *Johnny Reb* is a Confederate soldier, a *Johnny-come-lately* is a recent arrival, and a *stagedoor Johnny* seeks the company of actresses. Cornbread is also known as *johnnycake*, and people who have medical examinations may be asked to put on a *johnny*, a kind of robe open in the back.

The diminutive *Jack* has spawned as many common nouns as its original form *John*. *Jack Frost* is the personification of cold weather, while a *Jack-tar* is a sailor. Then there are *jack-o'-lantern*, *jack-in-the-box*, *jack-in-the-pulpit* (a plant), *jack-of-all-trades*, every man *jack*, and *jackanapes*—not to mention *jack pine*, *jackdaw*, *jackknife*, *jacksnipe* (a bird), *jackpot*, *jackstraws*, *jackrabbit*, and *jackass*. Finally, there are *jacks*, which include playing cards, devices to lift cars, braces, six-pointed metal objects used in a children's game also called *jacks*, and flags. *Jack* is also common as the second part of compounds: *applejack*, *blackjack*, *bootjack*, *crackerjack*, *flapjack*, *hijack*, *lumberjack*, and *steeplejack*.

The Scots version of *Jack* is *Jock*, from which we have *jocks* and *jockeys*. The noun *jacket* is, however, probably from the name *Jacques*, which is the French form of *James*, not of *John*.

“heavier” than that of PDE, with the colon in particular being used much more often, as can be seen in Figure 7.7. Further, although the punctuation marks of even sixteenth-century texts may all be familiar to the modern reader, the placement of these marks can be confusing. EMnE punctuation was primarily rhetorical in purpose; that is, it was used to point out balance and parallelism or to indicate pauses for breath when the lines were read aloud (as in dramatic works). Figure 7.7 shows at least two commas in positions where they would not be used today, at the end of line 2 and between *pause* and *or* in line 8. Figure 7.7 also has four colons (lines 2, 3, 4, and 9); of these, only the colon in line 9 could possibly be acceptable today.

EARLY MODERN ENGLISH MORPHOLOGY

After the radical inflectional losses that characterized Middle English, so few inflections were left that from about 1500 on, most of the “grammar” of English was carried by syntax rather than morphology. Indeed, by EMnE, it is hard to draw a sharp line between morphology and syntax. Of the inflections that remained at the end of ME, only two were lost during EMnE—the second-person singular

pronoun and the corresponding second-person singular indicative endings of verbs. There were, however, a number of distributional changes within the inflectional categories.

Nouns

In all essentials, noun morphology in EMnE was the same as that of PDE. The distinction between singular and plural remained, but cases were reduced to two—common case and possessive (genitive) case. All traces of grammatical gender were gone, and biological gender prevailed.

W 7.7

EMnE observed the same mutated plurals that we have today (*mice, feet, teeth, men*, and so on). Particularly in the early part of the period, a few *-n* plurals remained, often side by side with *-s* plurals. For example, Shakespeare used *shoes* as the plural of *shoe* in one act of *Hamlet* but *shoon* in the next act. (The form *shoon*, however, appears in a song and is necessary for the rhyme.)

two Provincia'll Roses on my rac'd *Shoes* (3.2.277)

How should I your true love know from another one?

By his Cockle hat and staffe, and his Sandal *shoone* (4.5.25–26)

Other *-n* plurals to be found occasionally in EMnE texts include *housen, hosen, eyen*, and the still marginally familiar *kine* as a plural of *cow*.

Measure words after numbers often—but not invariably—had unmarked plurals throughout the EMnE period. To use Shakespearean examples again:

but this our purpose now is twelve *month* old (1 *Henry IV* 1.1.28)

so hard that it seems the length of seven *year* (*As You Like It* 3.2.317)

a man of fourscore *pound* a year (*Measure for Measure* 2.1.123)

dig't himself four *yard* under the countermines (*Henry V* 3.2.62)

The neuter noun *kind* had had an unmarked plural in OE, and it frequently remained unmarked in EMnE (as it still often does today in speech).

all the *kind* of the launces have this very fault (*Two Gentlemen of Verona* 2.3.2)

Usage varied with the names of many animals; sometimes they took an *-s* plural and sometimes an unmarked plural.

but a team of *horse* shall not pluck that from me (*Two Gentlemen of Verona* 3.1.267)

presents me with a brace of *horses* (*Two Noble Kinsmen* 3.1.20)

fowls have no feathers, and *fish* have no fin (*The Comedy of Errors* 3.1.79)

canst thou catch any *fishes* then? (*Pericles* 2.1.66)

By EMnE, the *-s* possessive for both singular and plural nouns was almost universal, although traces of OE uninflected genitives remained for some kinship terms and formerly feminine nouns. By the end of the EMnE period, these traces were restricted primarily to fixed expressions where the genitive relationship was no longer clearly perceived—*mother tongue, fatherland, ladyfinger, lady slipper*. In

addition, the *-s* possessive was often omitted in expressions where the genitive noun ended in a sibilant or the following noun began with one, such as *for posteritie sake*, *for peace sake*. Here, however, the difference between EMnE and PDE is only in the written language; speakers today do not lengthen the sibilant or add an extra /s/ when they say such phrases, even though they do use the *-s* in writing.

In one respect, the use of the possessive differed startlingly in EMnE from its use in PDE. Apparently people interpreted the final /s/ (or /z/ or /ɪz/) of the possessive nouns as a contraction of the possessive adjective *his* rather than what it historically is, an inflectional ending. Then, in writing, they would spell out the full possessive adjective. This misinterpretation appears earliest and most frequently with *his*, but spread to the other possessive adjectives by analogy. For example, the town records of colonial Rhode Island have such examples as

John Browne *his* meadow
the said Daniell Williams *my* heirs
Wallings & Abbott *there* up land
Ann Harris *her* lot

Sometimes the same text, written by the same clerk, contains both the historically correct form and the form with the possessive adjective.

his Mothers decease
his deceased mother *her* will

The group genitive, that is, the addition of the possessive inflection to the end of the entire noun phrase instead of to the noun to which it logically belongs, is frequent in PDE, especially in speech (*a day or two's time*, *the Duke of Edinburgh's arrival*). The construction occurred in EMnE but less often than today. Combined with the *his* possessive, it can be confusing to the modern reader, as in the following examples.

his Brother Thomas Barnes who is deceased his son
her said deceased husband who belonged & was an Inhabitant of
Mashantatuck in Providence his Estate

Occasionally, the same phrase contains both the inflected genitive and the *his* genitive, or both the “logical” inflected genitive and the group genitive.

after mine & my wifes her decease
the Governors of Boston his letter

Adjectives

W 7.10

English adjectives had lost all their inflections except the comparative *-er* and the superlative *-est* by the end of ME, so there was little adjective morphology left to be changed by EMnE times. The rules for the use of the comparative and superlative, however, had not yet achieved their modern form. *More* and *most* were

historically not comparative markers but intensifiers (as they still can be in such expressions as *a most enjoyable evening*). In EMnE, this intensifying function was felt much more strongly; hence writers did not find it ungrammatical or pleonastic (redundant) to use both a comparative adverb and *-er* or *-est* with the same adjective. An example from Shakespeare is *in the calmest and most stillest night*. Further, the rules for when to use the periphrastic comparative had not yet reached their PDE rigidity. Therefore Shakespeare could say *violentest* and *certainer* and also *more bold* and *the most brave*.

Pronouns

Though personal pronouns remain to this day the most heavily inflected of English word classes, there were still a number of changes in the pronominal system between the end of ME and the end of EMnE in both the personal and other types of pronouns.

W 7.8
and
W 7.9

Personal Pronouns One systemwide change in the personal pronouns during EMnE was the development of separate forms for possessive adjectives and possessive pronouns. In OE, the form *mīn*, for example, had been used both adjectivally and pronominally. It could mean “my” and “of me.” In ME, *my* (or *mī*) began to appear as the adjective form used before a word beginning with a consonant, while *min* was used before words beginning with a vowel and as the absolute (or pronominal) form. In EMnE, *my* generalized as the adjective form in all environments, and *mine* became reserved for pronominal functions, the present distribution of the two. The use of *thy* and *thine* paralleled that of *my* and *mine* until the second-person singular pronoun itself dropped out of the language. By analogy with possessive nouns, the absolute forms *hers*, *ours*, *theirs*, and *yours* had appeared as early as ME. *His*, already ending in a sibilant, did not develop a separate pronominal form.

This left only *it* to be settled. In OE, ME, and the first part of EMnE, the possessive form of *it* had been *his*, identical to the masculine singular. By the late sixteenth century, however, the subject/object form *it* was also often used as a possessive, as in the 1611 King James Bible’s *That which groweth of it owne accord ... thou shalt not reape*. At about the same time, the possessive *its* appeared. Though Shakespeare normally used *his* or *it* (as in *Rebellion in this land shall lose his sway*), he has several examples of *its* (but spelled with an apostrophe): *The Cradle-babe, Dying with mothers dugge betweene it’s lips*. By the mid-seventeenth century, *its*, without an apostrophe, was the regular form.

As was pointed out in Chapter 6, the originally plural forms *ye* and *you* were already being used as polite singular forms during Middle English. During the seventeenth century, the singular *thou/thee* forms dropped out completely, probably beginning with the lower social classes. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, English had lost the singular-plural distinction in the second person; it survives today only in the forms *yourself/yourselfs*.

The earlier subject form *ye* gave way to *you* during the sixteenth century. Although *ye* continued to be spelled in texts for several decades afterwards, it

appears as both subject and object pronoun and probably represents simply the reduced pronunciation of you /jə/ still familiar in speech today.

The masculine singular pronoun *he* also had an unstressed version; its spelling, *a*, suggests that the vowel was lower than the typical unstressed pronunciation of *he* /i/ heard today, perhaps /ə/ or /ʌ/. It may have been considered substandard—Shakespeare uses *a* most frequently to represent the speech of the lower classes; for instance, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, the Watchman says *a has bin a vile theefe, this vii. yeares, a goes vp and downe like a gentle man* (“he has been a vile thief for seven years; he goes up and down like a gentleman”).

Demonstrative and Interrogative Pronouns The PDE system of demonstrative and interrogative pronouns was established in all its essentials during ME. However, EMnE still had a few minor differences from PDE. For example, although the plural form *those* appeared as early as late ME, the earlier plural *tho* remained in use until the mid-sixteenth century or so. *Whether* is today only a conjunction, but historically it is an interrogative pronoun meaning “which of two.” It could still be used this way throughout the EMnE period, in both direct and indirect questions.

Whether of them, think you, is the plainer pledge of ... Providence?
It is indifferent to me ... *whether* of the two sit in Parliament.

Relative Pronouns English has been a long time in developing a stable system of relative pronouns—indeed, considering current disputes about the use of *which* to introduce restrictive clauses, some might argue that the system is still not stable. By the eighteenth century, the PDE pattern was established in all its essentials, but practice varied during the EMnE period itself.

As has been true since at least Middle English, *that* was the all-purpose and most widely used relative pronoun. During EMnE, it could have a human or a nonhuman referent, and it often was used to introduce nonrestrictive as well as restrictive clauses (“Another error, *that* hath also some affinity with the former, is a conceit ...” [Bacon, 1625]). Frequently, *that* was combined with *which* to form a compound relative in constructions where we would use only one or the other today (“God’s ordinary mercy, *that which* he exhibits to all” [Donne, 1624]).

Which first appeared as a relative pronoun during Middle English and was used both by itself and in compounds during EMnE. In addition to *that which*, the compound *the which* was also common. *Which* could have animate as well as inanimate referents (for example, the King James Bible’s “Our Father *which* art in heaven”).

Although *who* appeared as a relative occasionally in late ME, it did not become frequent until the EMnE period, and even then it was rare before restrictive clauses. However, in constructions in which the relative clause was embedded within the main clause, simple *who* could serve as the subject of both clauses (“*who* steals my purse steals trash”). Today we use a personal pronoun followed by *who* in such constructions (“*He who* steals my purse steals trash”).

In addition to *who*, *that*, and *which*, *as* was fairly common as a relative in EMnE. A typical example is “all the goods *as* was brought to our view.”

Though *as* is still sometimes used as a relative pronoun today, it is considered substandard.

Complete omission of the relative pronoun, even when it would have been subject of the relative clause, was still acceptable. For example, Shakespeare could write “I have a brother is condemn’d to die.”

A final difference between EMnE and PDE worth noting is the frequent redundant use of a subject pronoun after a relative clause. This usage was especially common if the relative clause was lengthy, as in the following example from George Puttenham (1589).

Others *who* more delighted to write songs or ballads of pleasure to be sung with the voice and to the harp, lute, or citheron, and such other musical instruments, *they* were called melodious poets....

Reflexive Pronouns Forming reflexive pronouns by combining *-self* with the personal pronouns had begun in ME. The construction became more frequent in EMnE, but the older practice of using the simple object form of the pronoun as a reflexive also continued throughout most of the period. The following examples from Shakespeare are typical.

Get *thee* a good husband (*All's Well That Ends Well* 1.1)
 thou does *thyself* a pleasure (*Othello* 1.3.369)
 I will shelter *me* heere (*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 5.5)
 if I drown *myself* wittingly (*Hamlet* 5.1.18)

Although the compound reflexive has replaced the simple pronoun in standard PDE, the simple form still survives dialectally, especially as an indirect object. That the form is still recognized is illustrated by the fact that now in the twenty-first century we still use the phrase “I gotta get me some,” albeit colloquially.

Even as *-self* forms were being fixed as the normal reflexives, however, the use of reflexive pronouns in general was decreasing in the language. Verbs that had formerly been unvaryingly transitive, taking a reflexive pronoun when the direct object was the same as the subject, came to be used both transitively and intransitively. Among such verbs that Shakespeare often used reflexively were *complain*, *repent*, *fear*, *repose*, and *advise*. However, as the third of the following quotations illustrates, the reflexive object was not obligatory (and eventually would never be used).

to all the host of heaven I complain *me* (*The Rape of Lucrece* 598)
 where then, alas, may I complain *myself*? (*Richard II* 1.2.42)
 to whom should I complain? (*Measure for Measure* 2.4.171)

Self was originally an independent pronoun in English and could be used as subject as well as object. This usage was still acceptable in EMnE. (In the second example below, note also that *him* is used as a reflexive pronoun.)

because *myself* do want my servants' fortune (*Two Gentlemen of Verona* 3.1.147)
 he commends him to your noble *self* (*Richard III* 3.2.8)

Indefinite Pronouns The indefinite pronouns of EMnE are for the most part those still familiar to us today. One difference is that, whereas in PDE *every* is used only as a pronominal adjective meaning “all” or “each,” in EMnE it could also be used as an independent pronoun meaning either “all” or “each of two.”

If *every* of your wishes had a womb (*Antony and Cleopatra* 1.2.38)
There be two sortes of Blites ... and *every* of them is diuided again into two
kinds.

Other without a pluralizing *-s* could be used in EMnE as both singular and plural pronoun (“The best ground work whereon to build both the *other*”). In PDE, the pronominal adjective *some* can modify singular, plural, or uncountable nouns, but as an indefinite pronoun, it cannot refer to a singular, countable noun; in EMnE this was still possible: “*Some* will blushe that readeth this, if *he* be bitten.”

In PDE, the compound *somewhat* is only an adverb; *something* is the corresponding pronoun. In EMnE, both *somewhat* and *something* were used both as adverbs and as pronouns.

<i>Pronoun</i>	this gentleman told <i>somewhat</i> of my tale (<i>Measure for Measure</i> 5.1.84) I’ll give you <i>something</i> else (<i>Troilus and Cressida</i> 5.2.86)
<i>Adverb</i>	he’s <i>somewhat</i> bigger than the knight he spoke of (<i>Two Noble Kinsmen</i> 4.2.94) he’s <i>something</i> stained with grief (<i>The Tempest</i> 1.2.415)

In general, then, the use of indefinite pronouns in EMnE was less rigid than it is in PDE.

Verbs

W 7.11

The most significant changes in verbs between ME and the end of EMnE involved the development of verb phrases and hence are really more a question of syntax than of morphology. Nonetheless, EMnE saw the continuation of a number of processes that had been going on since OE times, processes such as the change of strong verbs to weak, the further reduction of verbal inflections, and the gradual decline in the use of the subjunctive.

Strong Verbs By the end of the EMnE period, the division of English verbs into strong and weak categories was no longer a viable one. The majority of OE strong verbs had disappeared, become weak, or lost separate past and past participle forms. Further, sound changes in weak verbs during ME had created irregularities in many weak verbs (for example, *keep/kept*). From EMnE on, it is really more reasonable to speak of regular and irregular verbs than of strong and weak verbs.

As can be seen by the present-day fluctuation between, say, *strove* and *strived* as the past tense of *strive*, strong verbs do not become weak all at once. Instead,

alternate strong and weak forms are used together for decades or even centuries. EMnE seems to have been a time when alternate forms for many verbs were acceptable. For instance, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century documents show such variants in past participle forms as *gave/given*, *hald/holden*, *wrott/wratten/written*, *shewed/shewn*, *drank/drunk*, and *chose/chosen*.

Another general tendency of the period was the collapse of the distinction between the past tense and the past participle, with one vowel characterizing both forms, as in *cling/clung/clung* or *shine/shone/shone*. Perhaps one factor encouraging this coalescence was the existence of a rather large number of (weak) irregular verbs with vowel changes but a single form for preterite and past participle, verbs like *hear/heard/heard* and *sleep/slept/slept*.

Despite fluctuation and indecision, twenty or more earlier strong verbs became unambiguously weak during EMnE. Among these are *brew*, *writhe*, *creep*, *seethe*, *yield*, *carve*, *reap*, *wash*, *laugh*, *flow*, *starve*, and *knead*. In some instances, earlier strong past participles have survived as adjectives, *molten* and *sodden*, for example.

Weak Verbs By the end of Middle English, weak verbs had become the “regular” verbs of English, and almost any new verb entering the language would follow this paradigm. Nonetheless, at least three formerly weak verbs did become strong during the period: *dig*, *spit*, and *stick*. Some weak verbs that had had irregularities in their paradigm due to earlier sound changes were regularized by analogy. Examples include *work*, whose earlier preterite and past participle survive today only as an adjective (*wrought iron*). Earlier *kemb* gave way to *comb*, formed from the noun; again, the former participle survives adjectivally in *unkempt*.

A general tendency during the period was for Latinate loans ending in /t/ (for example, *situate*, *convict*, *degenerate*, *contract*) to take no ending at all in the past participle. This tendency was probably partly the result of analogy with Latin past participles, but it also had a parallel in native verbs like *hit* and *set*.⁴

Other Verbs The anomalous verbs *be*, *do*, and *go* had essentially taken on their modern forms by the end of ME, and there has been little change in them since. During EMnE, *went* completely supplanted *yede* as the past tense of *go*, and *gone* replaced *yeden* as the past participle. For the verb *to be*, *are* became the standard present plural indicative form, though the alternate *be* was possible throughout the period (and survives dialectally to the present day).

The preterite-present verbs (or modal auxiliaries, as they can be called now) have historically been unstable, as is attested by their origin as verbs whose past tenses came to be used as present tenses. EMnE was a period of particularly great changes in their form, function, and meaning. First, the membership of the class of modal auxiliaries continued to decline. OE *unnan* ‘to grant’ and *(ge)munan* ‘to

4. The process of reducing past and past participle endings of verbs ending in /t/ is still going on in English. Most speakers accept either *knit* or *knitted*, for example. Some people distinguish between past *fit* ‘conformed in size or shape, was suitable’ and *fitted* ‘altered to make conform’.

remember' had been lost in ME. During EMnE, OE *þurfan* 'to need' and *dugan* 'to avail' were totally lost, and *witan* 'to know' survived only dialectally and in such archaic expressions as "God wot." Of the surviving modals, *couth*, the earlier past tense of *can*, gave way to *could*. The present *mote* was lost entirely, and the earlier past tense *must* came to be used with present (or future) meaning. For *dare*, a regular weak past, *dared*, began to compete with the earlier past *durst*. By the end of EMnE, *might* had supplanted earlier *mought* as the past form of *may* in the standard language, though *mought* is found as late as the eighteenth century ("authority that they had or *mought* have" [1720]).

Even in OE, some of the preterite-present verbs had been defective, lacking some of the nonfinite forms (infinitive, past participle, and present participle). The attrition continued during ME, and, by the end of EMnE, most of these verbs lacked all nonfinite forms. At the same time, *will* moved into the category of modal auxiliaries. *Dare* began to acquire characteristics of a regular weak verb; it developed an infinitive form *to dare* and could be followed by a marked infinitive ("what we dared to say"). An originally regular weak verb, *need*, also acquired some of the characteristics of a modal, such as that of not being followed by a marked infinitive ("we need not say").

In PDE, the modal auxiliaries are always followed by an unmarked infinitive, which serves as the lexical verb. We say, *I can run*, *We must work*, and *You might go*, not *I can to run*, *We must to work*, and *You might to go*. In EMnE, the modals were still sufficiently independent verbs to appear without a following infinitive when a verb of motion was implied and was clear from the context. Examples from Shakespeare include

I must away this night toward Padua (*The Merchant of Venice* 4.1.403)
it will out at the casement (*As You Like It* 4.1.162)
 thou *shalt* to prison (*Love's Labour's Lost* 1.2.158)

Most of the present-day meanings of the modal auxiliaries existed during EMnE, but older meanings also often survived. For example, *can* could still mean "know," but it was not used in its contemporary sense of "receive permission." *Shall* retained a sense of obligation throughout the period (as in the King James Bible's "Thou *shalt* not kill"), as it still does to some extent in legal language today. *Will* implied prediction and was regularly used as a marker of the future but also retained a strong sense of desire; *would* was still the regular past tense of *will* in this meaning.

As noted in the preceding chapter, verb + adverb combinations (or two-part verbs, as they are often called) appeared at least occasionally in ME. By EMnE, they were extremely common, perhaps as common as they are in PDE. The following are a few of the numerous instances to be found in Shakespeare.

shorten up their sinews with aged cramps (*The Tempest* 4.1.269)
 have *worn* your eyes almost *out* in the service (*Measure for Measure* 1.2.110)
 when she had writ it, and was *reading* it *over* (*Much Ado about Nothing* 2.3.137)
 I were best to *cut* my left hand *off* (*Merchant of Venice* 5.1.177)

Reduction of Verbal Inflections Middle English had seen a great attrition in the number of verb inflections and, at the same time, a wide variety of dialectal variants in the surviving inflections. By the end of EMnE, the total number of inflections had been reduced to its PDE state, and the few remaining ones had

Purple Prose

Shakespeare is the best-known practitioner of Renaissance verbal exuberance, but some of his contemporaries were as flamboyant, if not as successful, in their linguistic experimentation. Among them was John Lyly, whose prose romance *Euphues, The Anatomy of Wit* (1578) has given its name to an affected, overblown elegance of style characterized by elaborate similes, antitheses, and alliteration. Wordiness is inherent in euphuism, so a lengthy quotation is necessary to convey the flavor of Lyly's prose.

The freshest colors soonest fade, the teenest razor soonest turneth his edge, the finest cloth is soonest eaten with moths, and the cambric sooner stained than the coarse canvas; which appeared well in this Euphues, whose wit being like wax apt to receive any impression, and having the bridle in his own hands either to use the rein or the spur, disdaining counsel, leaving his country, loathing his old acquaintance, thought either by wit to obtain some conquest or by shame to abide some conflict, and leaving the rule of reason, rashly ran unto destruction, who, preferring fancy before friends and his present humor before honor to come, laid reason in water, being too salt for his taste, and followed unbridled affection, most pleasant for his tooth. When parents have more care how to leave their children wealthy than wise, and are more desirous to have them maintain the name than the nature of a gentleman; when they put gold into the hands of youth where they should put a rod under their girdle; when instead of awe they make them past grace, and leave them rich executors of goods and poor executors of godliness; then it is no marvel that the son, being left rich by his father's will, become retchless by his own will.*

Over two centuries later, Walter Scott parodied euphuism in the character of Sir Piercie Shafton in his novel *The Monastery* (1820).

"Ah, that I had with me my *Anatomy of Wit*—that all-to-be-unparalleled volume—that quintessence of human wit—that treasury of quaint invention—that exquisitely-pleasant-to-read, and inevitably-necessary-to-be-remembered manual of all that is worthy to be known—which indoctrines the rude in civility, the dull in intellectuality, the heavy in jocosity, the blunt in gentility, the vulgar in nobility, and all of them in that unutterable perfection of human utterance, that eloquence which no other eloquence is sufficient to praise, that art which, when we call it by its own name of Euphuism, we bestow on it its richest panegyric....

"Even thus," said he, "do hogs condemn the splendor of Oriental pearls; even thus are the delicacies of a choice repast in vain offered to the long-eared grazer of the common, who turneth from them to devour a thistle. Surely as idle is it to pour forth the treasures of oratory before the eyes of the ignorant, and to spread the dainties of the intellectual banquet before those who are, morally and metaphysically speaking, no better than asses."[†]

* Reprinted from *The Golden Hind, An Anthology of Elizabethan Prose and Poetry*, Revised edition, selected and edited by Roy Lamson and Hallett Smith. By permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. Copyright 1942, © 1956 by W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

[†] From Sir Walter Scott, Bart., *The Monastery* (Boston: Dana Estes & Company, Publishers, n.d.), pp. 122–23.

become standardized across the language. During EMnE, the last vestiges of the *-n* ending on infinitives disappeared, as did the present indicative plural endings *-n* or *-th*. The present participle suffix *-ing* became universal, in all dialects. The second-person singular present indicative ending *-(e)st* (or sometimes *-s*) survived intact until the category itself was lost—that is, until *you* supplanted *thou*.

The printed editions of Shakespeare's works show both *-s* and *-th* as the third-person singular present indicative; sometimes the two appear in a single line, as in *Macbeth* 1.3.79: "The Earth *hath* bubbles, as the Water *ha's*." Nevertheless, although *-th* was still being written as the third-person singular ending as late as the eighteenth century, the *-s* ending was universal in speech from the seventeenth century on. A number of writers of the period comment on this written archaism.

Though use of the subjunctive mood declined during EMnE, it was still alive. Where in PDE we use a modal, a quasi-modal, or simply the indicative form of a verb, EMnE frequently employed a subjunctive form. Subjunctives were used in both independent and subordinate clauses to express uncertainty, wishes (optatives), conditions, and contrary-to-fact situations. The Lord's Prayer of the King James Bible has good examples of the optative use of the present subjunctive: *Thy kingdom come, thy will be done* (i.e., "may your kingdom come, may your will be done"). One instance of the use of the past subjunctive to express a conditional can be found in Marlowe's lines from *Doctor Faustus*: *Couldst thou make men to live eternally, ... Then this profession were to be esteemed* (i.e., "this profession would be esteemed"). Shakespeare's *Yet were it true/To say this boy were like me* ("it would be true to say this boy is like me") shows subjunctives in both the independent and subordinate clauses of a sentence. Authors used both the indicative and the subjunctive after *think*. Thus, for instance, in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Shakespeare has the indicative in *I think your lordship is not ignorant*, but he uses the subjunctive in *I think Crab my dog be the sourest-natur'd dog, that lives*.

Uninflected Word Classes

W 7.13

Prepositions As any foreign learner of the language can attest, the meanings and usages of English prepositions are highly specific and idiomatic. There are to this day numerous dialectal differences with respect to prepositional usage. For example, in one English-speaking area, people say "stand *in* line" and in another area "stand *on* line." In the United States, some people say "log *in*" and others say "log *on*." One person is "sick *to* his stomach"; another is "sick *at* his stomach." Since the situation today is so fluid and unstable, it is no surprise that prepositional usage changed between ME and EMnE or that EMnE usage differs in many ways from that of PDE.

With the loss of most inflections that indicated grammatical relationships, ME developed or borrowed a large number of new prepositions. By the end of EMnE, a number of these had been lost again, including the French loans *maugre* and *sans* but also the native or Old Norse *betwixt*, *forth*, *next*, *fro*, and *sith* (as in "next the bank" and "the matter depending *betwixt* them"). However, a number

of new prepositions entered the language during the same period. For the most part, these were not entirely new words but compounds consisting of existing prepositions plus nouns. Some examples of these new phrasal prepositions are *by means of*, *in spite of*, *because of*, *with regard to*, and *in accordance with*.

Modern readers of EMnE texts are not likely to be confused by the lack of such prepositions as *in connection with*. They are more likely to misinterpret sentences in which a familiar preposition is used in an unfamiliar way. There are many such differences between EMnE and PDE. Space limitations forbid even a summary of all these changes; here are a handful.

I have no power *upon* [= over] you. (*Antony and Cleopatra* 1.3.23)

We were dead *of* [= from] sleep. (*The Tempest* 5.1.221)

without [= outside] the seven mile line (1711)

the highway *against* [= beside] John Whipples house (17th c.)

What think you *on't* [= of] (*Hamlet* 1.1.55)

Conjunctions The most common coordinating and subordinating conjunctions of ME continued to be used in EMnE, including *and*, *or*, *though*, *if*, and *that*. Earlier *ac* gave way completely to *but*, however. Many of the compound subordinating conjunctions with *that* which had arisen in ME remained in EMnE, for example, *while that*, *after that*, *when that*, and *for that*. Though these were to be lost by PDE, other new compound subordinating conjunctions developed during EMnE, including *provided that*, *insofar as*, and the correlative *just as ... so*.

W 7.14

Even when conjunctions themselves have survived through the centuries, their meanings and usages have often shifted. For example, in EMnE, *and* and *and if* were often used where we would use *if* today. *But* appears where PDE would have *unless*, and *since* where PDE has *when*.

they may tell it *and* [= if] they please (Shelton, 1612)

A sheepe doth very often stray, / *And if* [= if] the Shepheard be awhile away (*Two Gentlemen of Verona* 1.1.75)

He is of an yll inclinacion, *but* [= unless] he be forced (Lord Berners, 1534)

He can remember *since* [= when] we had not above three merchants ships of 300 tons. (Child, 1690)

In general, membership in the class of subordinating conjunctions and the meanings of these conjunctions have tended to be unstable throughout the history of English. Older ones are lost and new ones arise, even to the present day. For example, PDE British English has *immediately (that)* and *directly (that)* as subordinating conjunctions, while American English does not.

Adverbs As in PDE, the chief means of forming new adverbs from existing adjectives in EMnE was by adding the suffix *-ly*. However, plain adverbs, those without any suffix distinguishing them from adjectives, were still widely used and apparently completely acceptable, as is shown by such examples as *exceeding much worn*, *to be absolute dead*, *cannot possible come*, and *this day grows wondrous hot*.

W 7.12

The wide assortment of intensifying adverbs used in ME was also characteristic of EMnE, though some of the earlier ones such as *fele* and *swithe* were lost. *Very* became more common as the period progressed, and *pretty* arose as an intensifier during the seventeenth century (*pretty near square*). Colloquial PDE uses as intensifiers many Latinate words originally referring to fear or great size. Today we use *tremendously*, *enormously*, and *awfully* plus new intensifiers *arguably* and *inherently*. This practice began in EMnE, but was not as extensive as it is today. For example, Shakespeare says “I will be *horribly* in love with her” (*Much Ado about Nothing* 2.3.235), and *wondrous* is common as an intensifier in his works. *Exceedingly* and *extraordinarily* also occur, though infrequently. *Terribly* still retains its etymological sense, as in “it strook mine ear most *terribly*.” Shakespeare does not use *tremendously*, *enormously*, *frightfully*, *fearfully*, or *awfully* at all.

Interjections Most of the ME interjections mentioned in Chapter 6 continued to be used in EMnE. *Excuse me* as a general formula for apology arose during EMnE. *Please* was used but still not in its reduced contemporary form; it appeared in phrases like *if it please you*, *please you*, or *please* followed by an infinitive as in *please to taste this*. The cry *hollo* was used to attract attention or to express exultation (somewhat similar to PDE *hey!*)—modern *hello* did not become a standard greeting formula until the PDE period.

Expressions of surprise included *what!*, *O!*, *lo!*, and *hay!* The contemporary American English *wow!* first appeared in print in the sixteenth century but was primarily Scottish during the EMnE period.

The most striking feature of EMnE interjections was the large number of euphemistic distortions of the name of the deity that appeared in the late sixteenth and especially the seventeenth century, when Puritan influence was strong in England. These exclamations include *'sblood* (God's blood), *'zounds* (God's wounds), *egad* (Ah, God), and a wide variety of compounds beginning with *od* (short for *God*): *odsbones*, *odslife*, *odstruth*, *od's pithkins* (God's pity), and even nonsensical formations like *od's haricots* (God's French beans) and *od's kilderkins* (God's little barrels).

EARLY MODERN ENGLISH SYNTAX

W 7.15

In most of the larger patterns, the syntax of Early Modern English is like that of Present-Day English. Indeed, it is so similar that the real differences may escape attention because they are minor and the context makes the meaning clear. Further, because EMnE texts are still widely read and familiar, their differing constructions are at least passively familiar to the modern reader. Quotations from Shakespeare and the King James Bible are so much a part of our cultural heritage that we normally do not think of an expression like “They toil not, neither do they spin” as being ungrammatical in PDE. When contemporary writers or speakers use such earlier constructions for stylistic effect, we recognize them as “elevated” or “oratorical” but nonetheless completely intelligible and acceptable.

Hence John F. Kennedy could say “Ask not what your country can do for you” without fear of being misinterpreted.

More elusive are the differences that are merely statistical, such as the greater use of the inflected subjunctive in EMnE. We still use the subjunctive today and under many of the same circumstances that it was used in EMnE, but we do not use it as often. A number of the ways in which EMnE syntax differs from that of PDE are negative ones, and we are much less likely to observe that something is *not* present than we are to notice that a strange construction *is* present in a text. For instance, few modern readers will be struck by the fact that EMnE texts do not contain extensive noun-adjunct constructions of the type *market data analysis sheets*.

Syntax within Phrases

Noun Phrases As was noted in Chapter 6, most of the word-order patterns of PDE noun phrases were firmly established in ME and have changed little since then. EMnE use of the definite and indefinite articles differed in a few minor ways from that of PDE, but these are really matters of idioms rather than basic structural differences. For example, John Donne could write *a child that is embalmed to make mummy*, where PDE would have an indefinite article before *mummy*. Conversely, the names of scholarly disciplines and of diseases often were preceded by the definite article, where we would use no article at all today. Thus Francis Bacon wrote *let him study the mathematics and bowling is good for the stone* [kidney stones]. (Compare PDE *the measles, the mumps, the flu*.)

Early Modern English also sometimes modified a noun with both a demonstrative adjective and a possessive adjective, where PDE would use a demonstrative and of + possessive pronoun. Where Bacon wrote *atheists will ever be talking of that their opinion*, we would write *of that opinion of theirs*. Possessive adjectives also occasionally followed adjectives in a noun phrase, as in Shakespeare’s *ah! poor our sex*.

The ME legacy of allowing single adjective modifiers (especially Latinate adjectives) to follow rather than precede their noun head continued in EMnE, though the frequency of such constructions decreased throughout the period. Some sixteenth-century examples include *faith invincible*, *God’s promises infallible*, *a means convenient*, and *the line royal*.

The use of noun adjuncts, which had just begun in ME, increased greatly during the EMnE period; a few random eighteenth-century examples are *hackney coach*, *neighborhood broker*, *sugar almonds*, and *merchant goods*. Nonetheless, the frequency of such constructions was lower than in PDE, and the appearance of more than one adjunct per noun head was still rare.

Adverbial Modifiers The syntax of adverbial modifiers in EMnE was in general similar to that of PDE, though a tendency remained throughout the period to place the adverbial before rather than after the words being modified. Especially common was the insertion of an adverbial modifier between an auxiliary

verb and a past participle. The following examples are from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

is *again* come together
the Council have *to them* Granted Administration
which he *behind him* left
and was *by them* Examined

Double negatives, common in ME, became less common in EMnE but still appeared and apparently were considered acceptable until at least the eighteenth century; the following two examples are from the late seventeenth century.

they are *not* bound to stand to *no* determination
nor that she *never* was married

Verb Phrases As noted in Chapter 6, the modern system of compound verb phrases began, but was by no means fully developed, in Middle English. During EMnE, the system developed much further, although it still had not quite reached its PDE stage by the end of EMnE. The period had a full-fledged perfect tense, used in essentially the same way that the perfect is used today. Particularly in the early part of EMnE, the auxiliary for intransitive verbs of motion was still *be* rather than *have*. By the sixteenth century, *have* was encroaching on the territory of *be*. Shakespeare used both *be* and *have* as the perfect auxiliary for verbs of motion; *have* is especially frequent in phrases with a modal auxiliary.

this gentleman is happily arriv'd (*The Taming of the Shrew* 1.2.212)
I *have* since arriv'd but hither (*Twelfth Night* 2.2.4)
did he not say my brother *was* fled? (*Much Ado about Nothing* 5.1.205)
love's golden arrow at him should *have* fled (*Venus and Adonis* 947)

In speech, *have* as an auxiliary was reduced to /ə/ (as it normally is today), as the following late-seventeenth-century examples illustrate: *should a return'd*.

The perfect infinitive came later than the perfect tense, but it too was being used by the seventeenth century.

I had hopes *to haue got* away (1652)
we did not intend *to have baffelled* you in our pay (1696)

The progressive tense originated in ME, increased greatly during EMnE, and was fully developed by the end of the sixteenth century. Nonetheless, it was used much less frequently than it is in PDE; often we find the simple present or simple past where the progressive would be obligatory today. For example, in *Henry VI, Part III*, Warwick asks the already dead Clifford, "Speak, Clifford, dost thou know who *speaks* to thee?" In PDE, we would say *who is speaking*.

Although both the perfect and the progressive tenses were used extensively during EMnE, the combination of the two in a single verb phrase ("I have been watching you") was rare. The progressive-passive combination ("you are being watched") did not develop until the late eighteenth century. The three-way combination of progressive, passive, and perfect ("you have been being

watched”) was not to appear at all until PDE. In fact, passive constructions in general were less common in EMnE than they are in PDE.

As was noted in Chapter 6 *do* in ME could serve as a causative auxiliary, as a periphrastic alternative to the simple present or past, and was just beginning to be used in forming negatives and interrogatives. By EMnE, causative *do* had disappeared while emphatic, contrastive *do* (as in PDE) was making its first appearances, though it would not become regular until late EMnE. Unemphatic periphrastic *do* continued into EMnE, and Shakespeare has numerous examples.

thou shin’st in every tear that I *do* weep (*Love’s Labour’s Lost* 4.3.32)
 so sorrow’s heaviness *doth* heavier grow (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* 3.2.84)
 unnatural deeds *do* breed unnatural troubles (*Macbeth* 5.1.72)
 the cry *did* knock against my very heart (*The Tempest* 1.2.8)

The use of *do* as a “dummy” auxiliary for forming interrogatives and negatives was fully developed by EMnE but was not obligatory. That is, one could either use the auxiliary *do* or employ simple inversion. Shakespeare employs both constructions freely.

I doubt it not (*Romeo and Juliet* 3.5.52)
 I do not doubt you (*Henry IV*, Part 2 4.2.77)
 Why do you look on me? (*As You Like It* 3.5.41)
 Why look you so upon me? (*As You Like It* 3.5.69)

Dangerous Dialectal Differences

Most of us have at one time or another been disconcerted by our mispronunciation of a word, either in our own language or in a foreign language. But on occasion an unacceptable pronunciation can have far more serious consequences than personal embarrassment. The biblical book of Judges tells the story of a conflict between the Ephraimites and the Gileadites, two ancient Israelite tribes located east of the Jordan River in what is now northwest Jordan. As the King James version relates the story,

Then Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead, and fought with Ephraim: and the men of Gilead smote Ephraim, because they said, Ye Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites, and among the Manassites. And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites: and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay; Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand. (Judges 12:4–6)

Though both the tribes were descendants of Joseph, they spoke different dialects. The initial consonant of the word for a torrent of water was /s/ for the Gileadites; the 42,000 Ephraimites who said /s/ lost their lives. The test word *shibboleth* has been borrowed into English where it refers to a pronunciation, word, or practice that distinguishes one group of people from another. Fortunately, death is usually not the consequence of the difference today.

PDE has an extensive and complex system of quasi-modals, or verb phrases that behave like modals by modifying the aspect of the lexical verb. The beginnings of this system go back to ME, and it continued to develop during EMnE. *Be going to* as a future auxiliary, *have to* ‘be obliged’, and *be about to* ‘be on the point of’ all became common during EMnE. The phrase *used to* was employed in its PDE sense, but, unlike in PDE, it could also be employed with present reference, as in *the meadow he useth to mow* (1710), meaning “the meadow he is accustomed to mow.” Still, the extraordinarily rich variety of quasi-modal constructions that characterizes Modern English was not yet fully developed. We cannot find in an EMnE text a verb phrase like *I don’t like to have to keep on nagging you*, with its three quasi-modals in succession.

Impersonal verbs were common in Old English, decreased in use in late OE, then were temporarily reinforced under French influence during ME. However, such constructions are seemingly alien to English, for they began to decline again by late ME and were almost totally lost by the end of the sixteenth century. The verbs themselves remained in the language but came to be used personally, that is, with a nominative subject. Of the common impersonal verbs of ME, Shakespeare never uses *meet*, *repent*, *chance*, *hunger*, *thirst*, or *happen* impersonally. He uses *yearn* and *dislike* impersonally once each, *fear* twice, and *like* several times, all with an expressed subject. However, he also uses all of these verbs personally.

it yearns me not if men my garments wear (*Henry V* 4.3.26)

I’ll do’t, but *it dislikes me* (*Othello* 2.3.47)

only *this fears me*, the law will have ... (*Two Noble Kinsmen* 3.6.129)

his *countenance likes me* not (*King Lear* 2.2.90)

The only impersonal construction that is common in Shakespeare is *methinks* (and *methought*). However, **himthought*, **usthinks*, **youthinks*, and so on, never appear, and Shakespeare regularly uses *think* as a personal verb, so even *methinks* is better regarded as a fossilized idiom in EMnE than as a true impersonal verb.

Syntax within Clauses

As noted in Chapter 6, most of the PDE patterns of subject (S), verb (V), and object/complement (O) were established by the end of ME. Still, EMnE, and especially the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, had more flexibility than we do today.

By the seventeenth century, the SVO order was regular in both independent and dependent declarative clauses. It was also typical after adverbials, and, unlike PDE, could be used even after negative adverbials.

I confess nothing, *nor* I deny nothing (*Much Ado about Nothing* 4.1.272)

never faith could hold, if not to beauty (*Love’s Labour’s Lost* 4.2.106)

The SOV order was still an available option during most of the EMnE period for pronoun objects and for emphasis, particularly in dependent clauses.

as the law should *them* direct (1708)
By Richard that *dead* is (*Henry IV*, Part I 1.3.146)

As in PDE, the order VSO was regular in direct questions and in conditional statements *not* preceded by a subordinator.

How *hast thou* offended? (*Taming of the Shrew* 5.1.107)
is not this my Cambio (*Taming of the Shrew* 5.1.114)
Were he my kinsman ... it should be thus with him. (*Measure for Measure* 2.2.86)

Unlike in Present-Day English, imperatives in EMnE frequently had an expressed subject. When they did, the subject followed the finite verb.

go, go, my servant, *take thou* Troilus' horse (*Troilus and Cressida* 5.5.1)
Do thou but *call* my resolution wise (*Romeo and Juliet* 4.1.53)

The VSO order was also often—but by no means invariably—used after introductory adverbials, including nonnegative as well as negative adverbials, but inversion after negative adverbials became regular by the eighteenth century.

therefore *was thou* deservedly confin'd (*The Tempest* 1.2.360)
So haply *are they* friends to Antony (*Antony and Cleopatra* 3.13.48)
Still *have I* borne it with a patient shrug (*Merchant of Venice* 1.3.109)
nor *can imagination* form a shape (*The Tempest* 3.1.56)
never till this day *saw I* him touched (*The Tempest* 4.1.144)

To emphasize an object or complement, the order OSV or OVS was occasionally employed.

- OSV A bursten-belly inkhorn orator called Vander hulke they pick'd out to present him with an oration (Thos. Nashe, *Unfortunate Traveler*, 1594)
OVS These conjectures did they cast in their heads (Lodge, *Rosalynde*, 1590)
OVS But answer made it none (*Hamlet* 1.2.216)

Syntax of Sentences

Because Latin had always been the language of education, it had had a certain amount of influence on the syntax of written English from the earliest days on. With the revival of Classical learning that accompanied the Renaissance, however, this influence increased greatly. "Elegant" English came to be characterized by long, heavily subordinated, periodic sentences (as in the opening lines of *The Canterbury Tales*) and by such devices as parallelism, couplets, balanced clauses, and use of absolute participles (as in "Today being the 4th of July..."). At the same time, the older, native tradition of cumulative, paratactic sentences was never completely lost. Indeed, it always characterized the spoken language and much of religious writing, such as homilies and biblical translations. A nice contrast between the two stylistic conventions can be found in the King James Bible

(1611). The translation itself is in the older tradition of loosely constructed cumulative sentences and clauses, connected primarily by the coordinators *and*, *but*, and *for*. The Dedication is composed in the then-fashionable Latinate style. Note the different flavor of the two following passages despite their similarity of subject matter. Note also that the difference between the two is not simply a question of lexicon—the passage from Mark has such Latinate loans as *deliver*, *councils*, *testimony*, and *premeditate*, and the passage from the Dedication has such homely native expressions as *run their own ways* and *hammered on their anvil*. Finally, note that the use of the Latinate vs. the plain style was not dictated solely by education or social class: The same men who translated the King James Bible wrote its Dedication, which includes both styles.

But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them. And the gospel must first be published among all nations. But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost.

—MARK 13.9–11

So that if, on the one side, we shall be traduced by Popish persons at home or abroad, who therefore will malign us, because we are poor instruments to make God's holy truth to be yet more and more known unto the people, whom they desire still to keep in ignorance and darkness; or if, on the other side, we shall be maligned by self conceited brethren, who run their own ways, and give liking unto nothing but what is framed by themselves, and hammered on their anvil, we may rest secure, supported within by the truth and innocency of a good conscience, having walked the ways of simplicity and integrity, as before the Lord, and sustained without by the powerful protection of Your Majesty's grace and favour, which will ever give countenance to honest and Christian endeavours against bitter censures and uncharitable imputations.

—DEDICATION OF THE KING JAMES BIBLE

These two stylistic traditions were to remain distinct throughout the EMnE period. Over 150 years after the King James Bible, Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* illustrates the native paratactic tradition, while Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is a fine example of the Latinate, hypotactic tradition.

John was bred a dyer, I believe of woolens. Benjamin was bred a silk dyer, serving an apprenticeship at London. He was an ingenious man. I remember him well, for when I was a boy he came over to my father in Boston, and lived in the house with us some years. He lived to a great age. His grandson, Samuel Franklin, now lives in Boston. He left behind him two quarto volumes, MS., of his own poetry, consisting of little occasional pieces addressed to his friends and relations, of which

the following, sent to me, is a specimen. He had formed a short-hand of his own, which he taught me, but, never practising it, I have now forgot it. I was named after this uncle, there being a particular affection between him and my father. He was very pious, a great attender of sermons of the best preachers, which he took down in his short-hand, and had with him many volumes of them. He was also much of a politician; too much, perhaps, for his station.

—BENJAMIN FRANKLIN,
Autobiography, (1771)

The superstition of the people was not embittered by any mixture of theological rancour; nor was it confined by the chains of any speculative system. The devout polytheist, though fondly attached to his national rites, admitted with implicit faith the different religions of the earth. Fear, gratitude, and curiosity, a dream or an omen, a singular disorder, or a distant journey, perpetually disposed him to multiply the articles of his belief, and to enlarge the list of his protectors. The thin texture of the Pagan mythology was interwoven with various but not discordant materials. As soon as it was allowed that sages and heroes, who had lived, or who had died for the benefit of their country, were exalted to a state of power and immortality, it was universally confessed that they deserved, if not the adoration, at least the reverence of all mankind. The deities of a thousand groves and a thousand streams possessed, in peace, their local and respective influence; nor could the Roman who deprecated the wrath of the Tiber, deride the Egyptian who presented his offering to the beneficent genius of the Nile. The visible powers of Nature, the planets, and the elements, were the same throughout the universe.

—EDWARD GIBBON,
Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Vol. I, (1776)

EARLY MODERN ENGLISH LEXICON

Earlier in this chapter we discussed the great increase in the English vocabulary during the EMnE period and the attendant debate over inkhorn terms, borrowing, and “oversea language.” Most of this increase came from borrowing, and most of the borrowing was from Latin. Still, other languages also contributed to the English lexicon during these centuries, and, for the first time, words from non-Indo-European languages entered English in fairly large numbers.

W 7.16,
W 7.17,
W 7.18,
W 7.19,
W 7.20,
W 7.21
and
W 7.22

Loanwords

Classical Loans It is impossible to give even a reasonable estimate of the total number of words from the Classical languages that entered English during the EMnE period. For one thing, we often cannot determine whether a word

came directly from a Classical language or entered via one of the Romance languages, especially French. Furthermore, from the Renaissance on, English borrowed roots and affixes to form new words that had not existed in the Classical languages. Should the word *cortical* be counted as a loan separate from *cortex* even though *cortical* was formed in English and was never a Latin word? How do we treat a word like *fibroma*, manufactured in English from the Latin root *fibr-* and the Greek suffix *-oma*? In sum, it is more reasonable simply to note that borrowings from the Classical languages were extraordinarily heavy and that they provided English not only with thousands of direct borrowings but also with the raw materials for manufacturing thousands more.

By and large, the Latin loans of EMnE tended to be fairly learned words—scientific, technical, artistic, philosophical, educational, and literary terms. This fact should not be surprising because it was scholars who introduced them, and the language of scholarship and education was Latin. Space limitations prevent an extensive listing of loans from the period, but perhaps an A-Z sample will convey the general flavor of the borrowings.

ambiguouss	gladiator	navigate	tangent
biceps	harmonica	opponent	ultimate
census	identical	perfidious	vacuum
decorate	joke	quotation	zone
emotion	lichen	ratio	
fanatic	mandible	scintillate	

Many of the Latin loans of EMnE were **doublets** (two words from the same source that enter a language by different routes) of words previously borrowed from French or Latin during Middle English. These recycled words could be introduced and retained because they were different in form and meaning from the earlier borrowings. For example, Latin *invidiōsus* gave English *envious* (via French) in Middle English and *invidious* (directly from Latin) in Early Modern English. For the most part, the EMnE borrowings are closer to the original Latin in form. A few other such doublets follow.

ME	EMnE	ME	EMnE
armor	armature	jealous	zealous
chamber	camera	pale	pallid
choir	chorus	palsy	paralysis
crimson	carmine	prove	probe
frail	fragile	spice	species
gender	genus	treasure	thesaurus

Most of the EMnE Latin loans came into English as nouns, verbs, or adjectives. However, the part-of-speech category sometimes underwent a shift in English. For instance, the English noun *affidavit* derives from the perfect tense

of the Latin verb *affidare*; *affidavit* meant “he has stated on oath” in Medieval Latin. Other Latin verb forms that ended up as nouns in English include *caret*, *deficit*, *fiat*, *tenet*, and *veto*. *Facsimile* is from Latin *fac simile*, an imperative phrase meaning “make similar.” English *propaganda* originated as a gerund from the phrase *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* ‘Sacred Congregation for Propagating the Faith’.

English has thousands of words that are Greek in origin, but the majority of these have come into English by way of Latin, or some came by way of French. To consider only a sampling of items beginning with *a*, Early Modern English borrowed directly from Greek such words as *anarchy*, *aorist*, *aphrodisiac*, *apothegm*, *autarchy*, and *autochthon*. By way of Latin or French, it acquired Greek words like *analysis*, *anathema*, *angina*, *anonymous*, *antidote*, *archetype*, *autograph*, and *azalea*. As these examples suggest, most borrowings from Greek are highly specialized, scholarly words.

Loans from Other European Languages Although Latin was the most fertile and most obvious source of loanwords into English during EMnE, other European languages also contributed hundreds, even thousands, of new vocabulary items.

French French influence on the English lexicon was heaviest during ME, but the flow of loans continued throughout EMnE and into Present-Day English. In EMnE, French loans outnumbered those from any other contemporary language. French, in fact, continued as the language of some kinds of legal documents into the seventeenth century, and many in the upper classes spoke and read French. The majority of French loans during EMnE were fairly specialized words. Typical examples are *admire*, *barbarian*, *compute*, *density*, *effigy*, *formidable*, *gratitude*, *hospitable*, *identity*, *javelin*, *liaison*, *manipulation*, *notoriety*, *optic*, *parade*, *ramify*, and *sociable*.

Italian Contacts between England and Italy increased after the sixteenth century and, not surprisingly, were accompanied by many English loans from Italian. Borrowings were heavy in trade, architecture, and the arts, with musical terms being particularly prominent (*adagio*, *alto*, *andante*, *aria*, *operetta*, *oratorio*, *solo*, *sonata*). A wide variety of other semantic fields was represented in the Italian loans, as is evidenced by words like *balcony*, *bandit*, *ghetto*, *macaroni*, *motto*, *regatta*, *vermicelli*, *carnival*, *ditto*, *malaria*, *zany*, *antic*, *archipelago*, *arsenal*, *artichoke*, *tariff*, and *belladonna*.

Spanish and Portuguese Spanish and Portuguese can be treated together because the two languages are much alike and the nature of their loans to EMnE is similar; indeed, for many loans (for instance, *hurricane*, *jaguar*, *rusk*), it is impossible to tell whether the immediate source was Spanish or Portuguese. Both the Spanish and the Portuguese had a long head start on the English in the exploration, establishment of commercial relations, and colonization of the non-European

world. Hence many of our terms for the exotic products and life forms found in the Far East and the New World came directly from one of these two languages, though indirectly from some non-Indo-European language. Portuguese examples include *mango*, *albacore*, *betel*, *pagoda*, *tank*, *yam*, *tapioca*, and *cashew*. A few of the many Spanish examples are *cigar*, *papaya*, *potato*, *puma*, *alpaca*, *avocado*, *cannibal*, *canoe*, *chili*, *maize*, *tomato*, *coyote*, *llama*, *iguana*, and *hammock*. Among the native Portuguese words borrowed by EMnE are *auto-da-fé*, *palaver*, *molasses*, *albino*, and *dodo*. EMnE borrowings of native Spanish words include *anchovy*, *breeze*, *castanet*, *cockroach*, *sombrero*, and *tortilla*.

Dutch Geographic proximity and extensive political and commercial relations between England and the Low Countries facilitated the borrowing of scores of Dutch words into English during EMnE. Dutch prominence in seafaring gave such nautical words as *avast*, *boom*, *commodore*, *cruise*, *deck*, *reef*, *scow*, *sloop*, *smack*, *smuggle*, *splice*, *stoke*, and *yacht*. Their famous school of painting provided words like *easel*, *etch*, *landscape*, *sketch*, and *stipple*. Miscellaneous loans include *blunderbuss*, *brandy*, *clapboard*, *drill*, *foist*, *gruff*, *muff*, *ravel*, *sleigh*, *snuff*, *sputter*, and *uproar*. These examples show that Dutch loans tended to be less scholarly and abstract than the typical French and Latin loans of the period; even when the words are specialized (like *stipple* or *smack*), they are practical and concrete.

German Partly because Germany was so late in achieving political unification, hence in developing a standard language, German loans into English have never been especially heavy. German preeminence in geology and mining provided the eighteenth-century loans *bismuth*, *cobalt*, *gneiss*, *meerschaum*, *quartz*, and *zinc*. Miscellaneous loans of the period include *carouse*, *fife*, *halt*, *knapsack*, *noodle*, *plunder*, *swindle*, *venerer*, and *waltz*.

Celtic Languages A respectable number of Celtic loans entered English during EMnE—proportionally more than in previous periods. From one Celtic language or another came *banshee*, *brogue*, *caber*, *cairn*, *galore*, *hubbub*, *leprechaun*, *plaid*, *ptarmigan*, *shamrock*, *shillelagh*, *slogan*, *trousers*, and *whiskey*.

Other European Languages Borrowing from European languages other than those already mentioned was minimal. The few loans that did come into English were chiefly the names of specialized products or topographical features not indigenous to England. From Russian came *beluga*, *kvass*, *mammoth*, and *steppe*. Norwegian contributed *auk*, *fjord*, *lemming*, and *troll*. *Eider* and *geyser* are from Icelandic, and *tungsten* from Swedish. Hungarian gave *hussar*.

Loans from Non-Indo-European Languages During the Renaissance, Europe greatly increased its contact with the world beyond its own confines and discovered a New World hitherto unknown to Europeans. This new traffic led to the introduction of many loanwords into European languages, including English.

Amerindian Languages We have already noted that EMnE received a number of loans from New World languages via Spanish, Portuguese, and French. In addition, several dozen words were borrowed from American Indian languages directly into English as a result of the English settlements in North America. These settlements were on the Eastern seaboard, where the dominant Indian linguistic family was Algonquian; most of the loans are from Algonquian languages. The semantic areas represented by the loans reflect the nature of the contact between the English and the Indians; because the English settled among the Indians, we find a number of cultural terms in addition to the predictable names of unfamiliar plants, animals, and artifacts. Yet, because the topography of eastern North America is not strikingly different from that of England and the Continent, we do not find new names for topographical features.

<i>Animals</i>	menhaden, moose, muskrat, opossum, raccoon, skunk, terrapin, woodchuck
<i>Plants and Food</i>	hickory, hominy, pecan, persimmon, poke(weed), pone,
<i>Products</i>	squash, succotash, tamarack
<i>Artifacts</i>	moccasin, tomahawk, totem, wampum, wigwam
<i>Cultural Relations</i>	caucus, manitou, papoose, powwow, sachem, sagamore, squaw

Asian Languages During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the British successfully vied with the Portuguese, French, and Dutch for control of the Indian subcontinent. As a result of their conquest, the English language acquired many new loanwords. The most important contributor was Hindi, which gave such words as *bandanna*, *bangle*, *bungalow*, *cheetah*, *cowrie*, *cummerbund*, *dungaree*, *gunny*, *guru*, *jungle*, *myna*, *nabob*, *pundit*, *sari*, *seersucker*, *shampoo*, *toddy*, and *veranda*. Tamil provided *catamaran*, *cheroot*, *corundum*, *curry*, and *pariah*. From Bengali are *dinghy* and *jute*, and from Urdu is *coolie*.

Malay-speaking areas of the southeastern Asian islands were the source of loanwords like *amuck*, *caddy*, *cassowary*, *kapok*, *orangutan*, *rattan*, *sago*, and *teak*.

Considering their high levels of civilization and even technology, we might expect China and Japan to have contributed many loans to EMnE. But both these nations had closed their borders to foreign intrusion, so their influence on the English lexicon was relatively light. From Chinese, EMnE borrowed, for instance, *ginseng*, *ketchup*, *kum-quat*, *litchi*, *nankeen*, *pekoe*, *pongee*, *sampan*, *tea*, and *typhoon*. Japanese provided a few terms like *mikado*, *sake*, *shogun*, and *soy*. Remote and inaccessible as Tibet was, English still borrowed Tibetan *lama* and *yak* during EMnE.

Near and Middle Eastern Languages From the time of the Crusades onwards, loanwords from the Near and Middle East had been trickling into European languages. This flow continued during the EMnE period. Turkish was the largest direct source, although many of the Turkish loans were themselves borrowed from Persian or Arabic. From Turkish, English acquired *dervish*, *divan*, *jackal*,

pasha, *pilaf*, *sherbet*, *turban*, *vizier*, and *yogurt*. Probably directly from Persian were *attar*, *bazaar*, *percale*, and *shawl*. Arabic is the source of *ghoul*, *harem*, *hashish*, *henna*, *hookah*, and *sheik*.

African Languages Sub-Saharan Africa was not opened to significant European influence until the nineteenth century. Consequently, few loanwords entered EMnE from languages spoken in this area. Probably African in origin are *chigger*, *marimba*, and *okra*.

Formation of New Words

Although borrowing greatly increased the size of the English vocabulary during the EMnE period, English speakers did not stop forming new words from existing elements. The familiar processes of compounding and affixation continued. Functional shift (also called **zero derivation**) became common. Minor processes of forming words, such as clipping and blending, continued to be employed. In fact, it might be expected that new formations would be a more productive source of new words than borrowing: borrowing is necessarily restricted to those with some familiarity with a foreign language, but every native speaker is a potential creator of new words from the existing lexicon.

Compounding As has always been true in English, the majority of new compounds in EMnE were nouns and adjectives, with verbs and adverbs being less frequent and other parts of speech only occasional.

As in ME, the most productive type of EMnE compound noun was noun + noun. Hundreds of them appeared, the majority being concrete nouns naming new or newly discovered products or processes. A few examples are *air pump*, *buttercup*, *copyright*, *gunboat*, *nutcracker*, *saucepan*, *skinflint*, and *window sill*.⁵ A variant of the noun + noun combination was gerund + noun, as in *laughingstock*, *spelling book*, *stumbling block*, and *walking stick*. Another minor variant was possessive noun + noun; in many of these compounds, the apostrophe is not used in PDE. A few examples are *cat's-paw*, *death's-head*, *foolscap*, *helmsman*, *saleswoman*, and *townspeople*. Verb + noun compounds were also frequent: for example, *blowpipe*, *catchword*, *daredevil*, *leapfrog*, *pickpocket*, *ramrod*, *scatterbrain*, *snapdragon*, and *turncoat*. Among the many new compound nouns consisting of adjective + noun were *broadside*, *commonplace*, *dry dock*, *easy chair*, *hotbed*, *lazybones*, *poorhouse*, *shortcake*, *sweetbread*, and *wet nurse*.

The compound noun consisting of adverb + noun seemingly decreased in productivity between ME and EMnE, but a few examples are still to be found: *afterbirth*, *by-blow*, *inroad*, *upcountry*. Increasing in frequency, but still much less common than in PDE, was the verb + adverb combination, as in *castaway*, *draw-back*, *lookout*, *pinafore*, *say-so*, and *turnout*.

5. In deciding whether to spell the compounds discussed in this section as one word, two words, or a hyphenated word, I have followed *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (1981). Other dictionaries and even other editions of the same dictionary vary somewhat in their practice. The treatment of compounds is perhaps the last frontier of even marginal creativity allowed in English spelling today.

One of the most frequent types of compound adjectives in EMnE was the noun + adjective combination, for instance, *bloodthirsty*, *duty-free*, *heartsick*, *knee-deep*, *lifelong*, *noteworthy*, and *top-heavy*. Also common was the compound adjective consisting of an adjective and a noun with an *-ed* “inflection.” A few of the many examples from EMnE are *cold-blooded*, *double-barreled*, *eagle-eyed*, *good-natured*, *mealy-mouthed*, *public-spirited*, *red-haired*, *stouthearted*, and *thick-skinned*. A third relatively common type of compound adjective had a noun or adjective as the first element and a present or past participle as the second element. Instances with a noun as the first element are *painstaking*, *earthborn*, and *henpecked*; instances with an adjective as the first element are *easygoing*, *good-looking*, *heavy-handed*, *old-fashioned*.

Throughout the history of English, compound verbs have tended to be formed from preexisting compound nouns or adjectives. This practice continued in EMnE. For example, *breakfast* is first recorded as a noun in 1463 but as a verb only in 1679. The noun *horsewhip* had appeared in print by 1694, but the verb did not appear until 1768. Nonetheless, for a few compounds, the verbal function is recorded well before the nominal function, suggesting that the word was initially created as a verb. Most of these compounds are made up of a noun plus a verb: *handcuff*, *hoodwink*, *rib roast*, *spoonfeed*, *whitewash*. Another fairly productive type of compound verb during the period was the adverb + verb combination, as in *backslide*, *cross-examine*, *inlay*, and *rough-hew*.

Affixing English had lost most of its inflectional affixes by the end of the ME period, but it has increased the number of productive derivational affixes over the centuries; affixing has always been the largest source of new vocabulary items in English. By EMnE, the language had not only its native affixes and those borrowed from French during ME but also an array of new derivational affixes from Latin and Greek. For every compound in English, the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists at least a score of new words formed by affixing. We might take the treatment of the Latin noun *numerus* ‘number’ in English as an example of the tremendous productivity of the affixing process. The noun *numeral*, borrowed directly from Latin, is first recorded in English in 1530. To this stem, English had added *-ity* (*numerality*), *-ly* (*numerally*) by 1646 and *-ant* (*numerant*) by 1660. The Latin adjective form *numerous* is first recorded in English in 1586. By 1611, English had formed *numerosity* and *numerously*, and by 1631 *numerousness*. From Medieval Latin *numericus*, English formed *numerical* (1628), *numerically* (1628), *numerist* (1646), and *numerication* (1694). These examples are only some of the words formed from *numerus* by derivative suffixes; we have not even considered additional words formed by prefixes such as *in-*, *de-*, and *re-*. Note also that native suffixes like *-ly* and *-ness* are used freely alongside borrowed suffixes like *-ity* and *-ant*.

Functional Shift With the loss of most inflections in Middle English, functional shift became one of the important ways of forming new words in the language. This process accelerated during EMnE, and, aside from borrowing, was perhaps the third most common way of expanding the vocabulary (after affixing and

compounding). Of the various parts of speech, nouns and verbs participated most freely in the process. For the EMnE period, Hans Marchand⁶ records such noun-to-verb conversions as *badger*, *capture*, *guarantee*, *pioneer*, and *segment*. Among his examples of verb-to-noun shifts are *cheat*, *contest*, *slur*, *split*, and *whimper*. Other parts of speech can also be involved. For instance, the adjectives *lower*, *muddy*, *numb*, and *tense* all underwent functional shift to verbs during EMnE. The *OED* records many, many more instances that have not survived to the present day.

Minor Sources of New Words All of the minor processes for forming new words mentioned in Chapter 6 continued to provide at least a few new items in EMnE. In addition, some more modern sources made their first tentative appearances in EMnE.

1. *Clipping*. Clipping, whereby initial or final syllables are dropped from an existing word, provided such new words as *rear* (<*arrear*), *hack* (<*hackney*), *spinet* (<*espinette*), and *van* (<*vanguard*). Several not especially complimentary terms for people have their origin in clipping. From *rakehell* there was *rake*, and from *chapman* there was *chap*. French *cadet* had already provided the word *caddie*, which was then clipped to *cad*. Similar to clipping is the formation of new words by internal contraction of old ones. Thus from *fantasy* comes *fancy*. *Fourteen-night* is reduced to *fortnight*, *godfather* to *gaffer*, and *triumph* to *trump*.
2. *Back-formation*. Back-formation of the existing adjectives *disheveled*, *foggy*, and *greedy* gave the verb *dishevel* and the nouns *fog* and *greed*. Misinterpretation of the archaic adverb suffix *-ling* as a present participle ending provided the verbs *sidle* and *grovel* from *sideling* and *groveling*. From nouns ending in *-y* came such back-formations as *difficult* (<*difficulty*) and *unit* (<*unity*). Interpreting a French loanword whose singular form ended in *-s* as an English plural (a common source of back-formations) resulted in, for example, *tabby* from *tabis* and *marquee* from *marquise*. Somewhat more complex is the origin of English *gendarme*; its source is the French phrase *gens d'armes* 'men of arms', which was taken as a single plural word *gendarmes* and then made singular by dropping the final *-s*.
3. *Blends*. Blends were not to proliferate until PDE, but a number of new ones did appear in EMnE. Among them were *dumfound* (from *dumb* + *confound*), *apathetic* (from *apathy* + *pathetic*), and *splutter* (probably from *splash* + *sputter*).
4. *Proper names*. Scores of common nouns or other parts of speech were made from proper nouns during EMnE. From the names of places came, for instance, the words *calico*, *clink*, *coach*, *cognac*, *delft*, *duffel*, *finnan* (haddie), *frieze*, *jersey*, *landau*, *mocha*, *sardonic*, and *tangerine*.⁷ Inventors or people associated

6. Hans Marchand, *The Categories and Types of Present-Day English Word-Formation* (Birmingham: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1966), pp. 293–306.

7. The original place or personal names that gave rise to the common nouns mentioned here can be found in any good college dictionary.

with a process, event, or type of behavior gave their names to such words as *batiste*, *derrick*, *doily*, *dunce*, *galvanic*, *grog*, *mansard*, *martinet*, *pompadour*, and *praline*. Classical literature and mythology provided scores of vocabulary items; a few of these are *bacchanal*, *fauna*, *flora*, *gorgon*, *hector*, *hermetic*, *panic*, and *stentorian*. Even nicknames could give common nouns: *Richard* is the ultimate source of *dickey* and *hick*; *John*, of *jackanapes*; and *Dorothy*, of *doll*.

Botanical discoveries in the New World or the Far East, the pressure for classification and labeling brought about by Linnaean taxonomy, and a general interest in horticulture all led to the need for naming scores of newly identified or newly developed plants. During the EMnE period, the convention arose of naming new plants after their discoverer or developer; today, we can be fairly confident that any plant whose name ends in *-ia* has as its base a proper name. Some of the flower names thus given during EMnE include *begonia*, *camellia*, *fuchsia*, *gardenia*, *gloxinia*, and *magnolia*.

5. *Echoic words*. By EMnE, words that were echoic in origin were being recorded in fairly large numbers. To list only some items beginning with *b-*, the following echoic (or probably echoic) words first appeared in writing during the EMnE period: *baa*, *bah*, *bash*, *blob*, *blurt*, *bobolink*, *booby*, *boohoo*, *boom*, *bouwvow*, *bump*, *bungle*.
6. *Folk etymology*. EMnE produced a number of words formed or altered by folk etymology. Among the native words or phrases thus created was *stark naked* from earlier *start naked* 'naked to the tail'. *Start* here was the same word that appears in the bird name *redstart*; OE *steort* meant simply "tail." The bird name *wheatear* was also altered by folk etymology, probably from earlier *hwit* 'white' + *ers* 'ass'.

The large number of foreign loans in EMnE was a rich source of misinterpretation and consequent folk etymologizing. For example, French *musseroun*, *puliol real*, *curtal*, and *chartreuse* became *mushroom*, *pennyroyal*, *curtail*, and *charterhouse*, respectively. Portuguese *mangue* ended up as *mangrove*; Dutch *oproer* ('up' + 'motion') as *uproar*. German *ribbesper* (from *ribbe* 'rib' + *sper* 'spit') not only was folk-etymologized but also underwent metathesis of its two constituent elements when it became English *spareribs*.

7. *Verb + adverb*. A rich source of both verbs and nouns in PDE is the verb + adverb combination, as in *take out*, *pickup*, and *run-in*. As noted elsewhere, the process of forming new verbs in this fashion began in ME and became highly productive in EMnE. Nonetheless, the conversion of such verbs to nouns by shifting the major stress to the first syllable is a PDE phenomenon. Only a handful of such compound nouns are recorded prior to the nineteenth century; two examples are *comeoff* (1634) and *breakup* (1795).
8. *Reduplication*. In many languages, **reduplication**, or the formation of new words by doubling the initial syllable or all of an existing word, is a highly productive source of new lexical items. English seemingly has never been amenable to extensive reduplication. (We exclude here the use of reduplicating letters as an attempt to represent in writing nonspeech sounds, as in *ha-ha* for laughter; this type of reduplication dates back to Old English.)

Reduplicated words do not appear at all until the EMnE period. When they do appear, they are usually direct borrowings from some other language, such as Portuguese *dodo* (1628), Spanish *grugru* (1796) and *motmot* (1651), French *haha* ‘ditch’ (1712), and Maori *kaka* (1774). Even the nursery words *mama* and *papa* were borrowed from French in the seventeenth century. *So-so* is probably the sole native formation from the EMnE period; it is first recorded in 1530.

9. *Unknown origin.* As is the case for all periods of English, a large number of words whose origin is unknown first appear in EMnE. A few of the many examples from EMnE are *aroint*, *baffle*, *chubby*, *dapple*, *filch*, *gale*, *huddle*, *jaunt*, *lazy*, *mope*, *noggin*, *pet*, *qualm*, *rickets*, *sleazy*, *taunt*, *wraith*, and *yaw*.

Lost Vocabulary

In one sense, the only truly lost words are those that have not survived in writing and perhaps were never written down in the first place. Therefore, it is likely that many words familiar to most speakers of ME are irretrievably lost because they were never recorded in writing and dropped out of the spoken language. Obviously, we can say nothing at all about these words.

More generally, the term “lost” is applied to words not used in the standard language today. Here, however, there is the problem that specialists still use words that have become obsolete in the general vocabulary. For example, large dictionaries still list such words as *tuille* and *vambrace* without any label that they are archaic or obsolete; yet these names of pieces of armor are “lost” to most speakers of PDE because armor is no longer worn.

Still another problem that arises in defining “lost” vocabulary is that words often survive in regional dialects long after having been lost in the standard language. For instance, most speakers of modern English are not familiar with the word *orts* (fragments of food left over from a meal) unless they are language specialists or crossword enthusiasts. Should *orts* be considered part of the lost vocabulary of English or not?

The problem of defining “lost” notwithstanding, we cannot read any lengthy ME text without encountering a number of words that are not found in EMnE or PDE texts. Clearly, these words have been lost in some sense. An examination of the first few hundred lines or so of Chaucer’s “Melibee” is instructive in this respect. Because the tale is in prose and aimed at a general audience, we avoid the possible contamination of the vocabulary by special poetic terms or by the esoteric words of a highly specialized treatise. Excluding simple variant spellings, at least twenty words appearing in these lines were no longer in use by the end of EMnE or, in some instances, by the end of ME. Of these, one loan from French, *warisshen* ‘to cure, recover’ has disappeared completely. Several native English words have totally dropped out: *forthy* ‘therefore’, *cleped* ‘called’, *noot* ‘not know’, *algates* ‘nevertheless’, and *bihight* ‘promised’. What were originally dialectal forms (*give*, *their*) have replaced two forms once standard (*yeve*, *hire*). However, the majority of the now obsolete words

are variant forms of surviving French loans, or French loans later influenced by Latin.

<i>semblaunt</i> ‘semblance’	<i>avoutrie</i> ‘adultery’
<i>ententif</i> ‘attentive’	<i>noyous</i> ‘annoying’
<i>agreggen</i> ‘aggravate’	<i>secree</i> ‘secret’
<i>garnisoun</i> ‘garrison’	<i>perfourne</i> ‘perform’
<i>espace</i> ‘space (of time)’	

It would be foolish to take these few lines from a single text as representative of the entire vocabulary of “standard” Middle English. Nonetheless, the heavy proportion of lost words that are merely alternative forms of other, surviving words does suggest that a great deal of the lexical loss between ME and EMnE consisted of the sloughing off of unneeded variants of French loanwords.

EARLY MODERN ENGLISH SEMANTICS

In some respects, semantic change is much easier to study for the EMnE period than for preceding periods because the number of surviving texts is so much greater. We have multiple examples of most words in context, so subtle differences in meaning are easier to detect. Yet, the very abundance of textual material can be intimidating. Furthermore, the great increase in the total English lexicon caused by the extensive Latinate borrowing makes the task of determining and analyzing the complex semantic interrelationships of individual words extremely difficult.

W 7.23
and
W 7.24

One of the reasons why semantic change is so frustrating to investigate is that it is so inextricably related to other kinds of linguistic change. We have already seen that semantic change is highly correlated with lexical loss and gain. It is also intimately related to morphological and syntactical change. For example, in EMnE, the verb *have* first came to be used as a kind of modal auxiliary in constructions of the form *have* + *to* + infinitive (*we have to leave now*). This represents a morphological and syntactic change in that a new modal construction has entered the language. It also represents a semantic change in the word *have* itself. (For that matter, there is also a phonological change in *have* and *has* because the final fricatives in both have become unvoiced in this modal construction.) Another example of the same type involves the word *about*, an adverb meaning “around, all round” in OE and ME. It gradually came to imply motion, and in early EMnE took on quasi-modal status in the phrase *be about to*; the *OED*’s first citation in this meaning, *They were aboute to go for to descrybe the londe*, dates from 1535.

Generalization and Narrowing

The most obvious type of semantic change both from ME to EMnE and during EMnE is narrowing of meaning. This is to be expected: If the language is to retain the vast numbers of new loanwords, the meanings of existing words

must be narrowed to accommodate them. Indeed, as we examine the changes in meaning that appear in EMnE, there are scores of examples of narrowed meaning for each example of generalized meaning. The following list is but a tiny sample of the words that underwent semantic narrowing.

Word	Meaning before EMnE	Meaning after EMnE
acorn	fruits	fruit of oak tree
adventure	chance, luck, fortune, accident, danger, circumstance	unusual and exciting experience
battle	armed fight, battalion, troop, line of troops	armed fight
courage	heart, mind, disposition, nature, bravery, valor	bravery, valor
deer	animal	mammals of the family Cervidae
error	mistake, wandering, doubt, perplexity, chargin, vexation	mistake, deviance from the right
girl	young person of either sex	young female
harlot	rascal, thief (of either sex)	unchaste woman
read	think, suppose, estimate, teach, speak, mention, comprehend written matter, interpret	comprehend written matter, interpret, perceive, study
sermon	speech, account, religious discourse	religious discourse

A few examples of generalization can also be found. For example, prior to the seventeenth century, the noun *twist* referred to a twig, tendril, or branch, whereas today it can refer to almost anything that has been twisted or entwined, such as yarn, tobacco, slices of lemon, ankles, or the action of twisting itself. Until the eighteenth century, the word *crop* was restricted to sprouts or new shoots, and the word *plant* to shrubs, saplings, or seedlings. The verb *trend* formerly meant “to revolve, roll, or go in a circular motion,” whereas since the seventeenth century, it has generalized to mean “movement in a specified direction; tendency.”

Amelioration and Pejoration

Pejoration during EMnE can be illustrated by such words as *lust*, which formerly meant simply “pleasure, delight” without necessarily implying sexual desire. *Carp* once meant “speech, talk” and not constant complaining. *Coy* meant “quiet, shy, modest” until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, without the connotations of pretense or deviousness that it has since acquired. A *knave* was simply a boy until the end of the ME period, then referred to a page or other servant until the seventeenth century, when its present meaning of an unprincipled, crafty man took over.

There are also numerous examples of amelioration, though it is often the result of narrowing. That is, amelioration has occurred not because the entire

meaning of the word has changed but because earlier pejorative meanings or connotations have been lost. Thus *scant* no longer implies “sparing, niggardly”; *jolly* does not mean “arrogant, wanton, lustful”; and *bare* is not “useless, worthless.” Even as *lust* was degenerating to mean “excessive sexual craving,” *luxury* was losing its earlier meanings of “lust, licentiousness.” Similarly, though *knave* underwent great degeneration, *boy* came up in the world by losing earlier meanings of “rascal, servant, slave.” *Fond* no longer means “idiotic, mad.” *Prowl* retains connotations of stealth, but at least does not mean “plunder, rob, pilfer, get by cheating.” *Await* has ameliorated by shaking off the meanings “contrive, plot, lie in wait for.”

Certain semantic categories seem particularly prone to semantic shift for psychological or sociological rather than strictly linguistic reasons. For instance, it may be a universal of human behavior to mistrust people who are more gifted than average. Therefore, adjectives referring to cleverness tend to degenerate in their connotations. *Calculating* and *scheming* have always been pejorative in English—even though the nouns *calculation* and *scheme* do not necessarily have bad connotations. The words *sly* and *designing* once could be used in a favorable sense, even though their unfavorable senses have also been with them from the beginning. The adjectives *artful*, *crafty*, and *cunning* were all once exclusively favorable; *crafty* became pejorative in Middle English, and *artful* and *cunning* in Early Modern English. Although *clever* is typically favorable today, signs of its ultimate degeneration appear in such expressions as “too clever by half” and “too clever for one’s own good.” Nonetheless, even this strong tendency is not without its exceptions: *shrewd* was once strictly unfavorable and became more neutral in EMnE (though it should be noted that the earliest meaning of *shrewd* was “malicious, bad, evil”; it did not begin life as a word having to do with cleverness). *Subtle* had bad as well as neutral connotations in ME and EMnE but has lost most of its bad associations in PDE.

Strengthening and Weakening

Intensification of meaning is much less common than weakening. A few examples of intensification can, however, be identified from the EMnE period. The meaning of *jeopardy* intensified from “uncertainty” to “danger, peril.” *Appalled* intensified from “pale, weakened” to “filled with consternation or dismay.”

The much more common process of semantic weakening can be illustrated by such words as *quell*, which once meant “put to death”; *spill*, which formerly meant “destroy, kill, lay waste”; and *dissolve*, which meant “cause the death of.” Prior to the seventeenth century, *dreary* meant “gory, bloody, cruel, dire,” and *spite* could mean “evil deed, outrage.” *Fret* has weakened from its earlier meaning of “eat, devour, consume.”

Abstraction and Concretization

Many of the French loanwords borrowed into English during ME came in as abstract words to express new concepts. As these words became more familiar,

they were applied to concrete representations of the abstract principle, although the abstract meaning usually remained. For instance, the French loan *foundation* was first used by Chaucer (1385) in the meaning “action of establishing something,” but its use to refer to something specific that has been founded or established is not recorded until 1513. Completely parallel is the history of *organization*; it is first cited as an abstract term in the early fifteenth century but not recorded as meaning “an organized structure” until 1707. Two other instances are *misery* (1374 in the abstract senses and 1509 in the concrete sense) and *difficulty* (1382 as an abstract term and 1619 as a concrete term).

As noted earlier, extension of meaning from concrete to abstract is less common than the reverse shift. One example of a shift in this direction, however, occurred during the EMnE period. The *OED*’s first citation of the word *bravery* is as a concrete noun meaning a specific act of bravery (*not perceiving that this was but a bravery*, 1548). By 1613, the word was clearly being used in an abstract sense in the quotation *Full of inward braverie and fierceness*. The history of *bravery*, incidentally, also includes amelioration; earlier citations show the word to be similar in meaning to *boasting* or *bravado*, a meaning now lost.

Shift in Denotation

Shifts in denotation are common for the EMnE period. To cite merely a few examples, *blush* once meant “look, gaze”; *discover* meant “uncover, reveal”; and *yelp* meant “boast.” *Error* could mean “chagrin, vexation,” and *harmless* meant “innocent” (a meaning still retained today in some legal documents).

The dictionary definitions of *astrology* as “the foretelling influence of planets and stars on human affairs” or of *element* as “one of the simple substances out of which all material bodies are compounded” applied as well in EMnE as they do today, yet because our beliefs about the nature of the universe have changed so much since then, we cannot say that *astrology* and *element* have the “same” meaning today as they did in 1600. Although *grace* is still “favor and good-will,” the widespread loss of religious faith has deeply altered what *grace* now means. Similarly, *courtesy* can still be defined as “politeness and considerateness toward others,” but it no longer has the connotations it would have had for those Middle English speakers to whom the word stood for an entire way of life. Ultimately, semantic change involves not just the history of the word itself but all the outer history of the speakers of the language.

Shift in Connotation

It is not always easy to distinguish shifts in connotation from shifts in stylistic level. One example from EMnE illustrative of this difficulty is the verb *stuff*, once used in serious writing to mean “supply with defenders, munitions, provisions.” Another example is the noun *heap*, normally highly informal today if used to refer to human beings. That it was not always so informal is shown by the following quotation from *Richard III*.

Among this princely *heap*, if any here,
 By false intelligence, or wrong surmise,
 Hold me a foe... I desire
 To reconcile me to his friendly peace.

But the shift in connotation and stylistic level was obviously already under way when Shakespeare wrote these lines, for this quotation is the last one in the *OED* illustrating *heap* as a measure word for people.

Despite the relatively short period of time separating EMnE from PDE, many EMnE words had connotations lost to all but specialists today. In EMnE the words *nowadays*, *also*, and *ergo* seem to have been used only by vulgar or low-life characters, and the word *accommodate* was apparently felt to be affected (Brook, 63–64).

EARLY MODERN ENGLISH DIALECTS

Contrary to what one might expect, a great deal more is known about Middle English dialects than about Early Modern English dialects. The standardization of the written language at the beginning of EMnE has concealed most dialectal differences, phonological differences in particular. However, in combination with widespread education, a standardized writing system can even conceal dialectal differences in morphology and syntax. For instance, though someone might regularly use the dialectal construction “The cat wants in” (without an infinitive) in speech, it would not be used in writing—except when referring to it.

W 7.25

Although we have no extensive descriptions of nonstandard dialects for the EMnE period, people were certainly aware of their existence. A few writers comment on them, and some dramatists attempt to represent dialect. One famous example is Edgar’s use of Somerset dialect in *King Lear*.

Chill not let go, zir, without vurther ’casion. (“I will not let go, sir, without further occasion.”)

Here, *Chill* represents a contraction of *ich will*, and *zir* and *vurther* reflect the voicing of initial fricatives. In the same scene, Edgar uses the word *ballow* to mean “cudgel, stick”; because this word appears only in the Folios of Shakespeare, we assume it was his attempt to represent a dialectal variation in vocabulary.

However, even the scant evidence that the dramatists provide is not trustworthy because certain nonconventional spellings were conventionally used to represent rustic speech from any dialectal area whatsoever. Even if a writer tried to be faithful to the dialect, ambiguities and inaccuracies were inevitable because the English alphabet is not suited for representing subtle distinctions in pronunciation. Further, writers who were not native speakers of the dialect were likely to err in representing it (just as British writers today often make mistakes in their assumptions about the use of American English forms such as *got* versus *gotten* and the phrase *I guess*).

A fair amount of information about regional dialects could be garnered from personal letters, diaries, documents, and town records written by persons too poorly educated to have mastered standard spelling. For example, in the town records of colonial New England the high frequency of spellings like *Edwad*, *capetts*, *octobe*, and *fofeitures* (for *Edward*, *carpets*, *October*, and *forfeitures*) are so common that we must assume a general loss of preconsonantal and final /r/. Similarly, the high frequency of spellings like *par*, *nex*, *warran*, *bine*, *Collwell*, and *lan* (for *part*, *next*, *warrant*, *bind*, *Caldwell*, and *land*) reveal a general loss of /t/ and /d/ after another consonant. Much painstaking research remains to be done before we have a clear picture of the EMnE dialectal situation, either in Great Britain or in colonial America.

ESSENTIAL CONCEPTS

In summary, the most important features of Early Modern English are

- Phonologically, the Great Vowel Shift affected all ME long vowels and resulted in the loss of phonemically long vowels in English. The consonants /ʒ/ and /ŋ/ were added to the inventory of phonemes.
- Morphologically, EMnE was much like late ME, with only minor changes, such as the continued weakening of originally strong verbs.
- Syntactically, EMnE was similar to PDE, although the complex PDE system of verb phrases was not yet fully developed, and the use of noun adjuncts was still not as common as in PDE.
- Lexically, English continued to borrow heavily, especially from the Classical languages. Many loanwords came into the English language from non-Indo-European languages. Functional shift, clipping, and folk etymology became significant sources of new words for the first time.
- Culturally, English became an important language of the world, and English speakers began their attempts to improve it or at least to prevent what they regarded as further deterioration.

REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

Abbott, E. A. *A Shakespearian Grammar*.

Barber, Charles. *Early Modern English*.

Blake, N. F. *William Caxton and English Literary Culture*.

Blank, Paula. *Broken English: Dialects and Politics of Language in Renaissance Writings*.

Brook, G. L. *The Language of Shakespeare*.

Craigie, William Alexander. *The Critique of Pure English from Caxton to Smollett*.

Dobson, E. J. *English Pronunciation, 1500–1700*.

- Ekwall, Eilert. *A History of Modern English Sounds and Morphology*.
- Görlach, Manfred. *Introduction to Early Modern English*.
- Hitchings, Henry. *Defining the World: The Extraordinary Story of Dr. Johnson's Dictionary*.
- Jones, Richard Foster. *The Triumph of the English Language*.
- Kokeritz, Helge. *Shakespeare's Pronunciation*.
- Lagesse, Paul. *An Introduction to Early Modern English*.
- Leonard, Sterling Andrus. *The Doctrine of Correctness in English Usage, 1700–1800*.
- Lounsbury, Thomas R. *English Spelling and Spelling Reform*.
- McGrath, Alister. *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture*.
- Nicolson, Adam. *God's Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible*.
- Padley, G. A. *Grammatical Theory in Western Europe, 1500–1700: The Latin Tradition*.
- Palmer, Patricia. *Language and Conquest in Early Modern Ireland: English Renaissance Literature and Elizabethan Imperial Expansion*.
- Partridge, A. C. *Tudor to Augustan English: A Study in Syntax and Style from Caxton to Johnson*.
- Ronberg, Gert. *A Way with Words: The Language of English Renaissance Literature*.
- Starnes, DeWitt Talmage, and Gertrude E. Noyes. *The English Dictionary from Cawdrey to Johnson, 1604–1755*.
- <http://www.britishempire.co.uk/maproom.htm>
- <http://www.the-map-as-history.com/demos/home05/index.php>

This page was intentionally left blank